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URSULA FINCH

A NOVEL

BY

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CONTENTS

	Page
Chapter I	7
Chapter II	14
Chapter III	23
Chapter IV	36
Chapter V	46
Chapter VI	62
Chapter VII	70
Chapter VIII	80
Chapter IX	93
Chapter X	103
Chapter XI	114
Chapter XII	121
Chapter XIII	131
Chapter XIV	139
Chapter XV	148
Chapter XVI	160
Chapter XVII	169
Chapter XVIII	186
Chapter XIX	193
Chapter XX	203
Chapter XXI	211
Chapter XXII	220

PAGE

CHAPTER XXIII 227
CHAPTER XXIV 241
CHAPTER XXV 249
CHAPTER XXVI 260
CHAPTER XXVII 267
CHAPTER XXVIII 277
CHAPTER XXIX 284
CHAPTER XXX 297
CHAPTER XXXI 307
CHAPTER XXXII 317
CHAPTER XXXIII 328
CHAPTER XXXIV 338
CHAPTER XXXV 347
CHAPTER XXXVI 354
CHAPTER XXXVII 360

URSULA FINCH

CHAPTER I

URSULA FINCH climbed the steep hill that formed the principal street of the little Cornish port of St. Faith's. She moved slowly, for her parcels were many and heavy. She had just accomplished the weekly shopping and was now on her way home to Pentarn. At the top of the hill she paused, and looked across the little town which lay so picturesquely at her feet.

The scene was charming, and although it was so familiar to her its charm appeared to-day both new and arresting. May had come in with a wonderful burst of sunshine, a season of drought over which farmers, already anxious for their hay crop, were shaking their heads dubiously. Sea and sky were vividly blue this afternoon, and the bay of St. Faith's showed a stretch of ultramarine mingled with silver that was calm and silken, and met the gold of the sands in a warm and beautiful passion of color. The steep, rocky coast that rose above the bay was softened in places by lines of pale sand-dunes, or "towans" as they are locally called, covered with the long, dusky grass that stirred in the breeze.

Immediately below her was the harbor, full now of fishing-boats that were beginning to swim and rock once more as the water rushed in with the rising tide. Round three sides of the little harbor was built the fishermen's quarter, nests and alleys of small, crooked, irregular streets; the houses, fashioned of the rough, grey, Cornish stone, being for the most part low with high, sloping, slate roofs

broken by dormer-windows. Beyond those streets to the north, a little promontory known as the Island thrust itself sharply into the Atlantic. It was not so far away but that Ursula could see the dark-brown fishing-nets lying on the short, green turf of the Island, side by side with the patches of white where the weekly washing had been spread out to bleach in the sun. She could discern also the little grey chapel, dedicated to St. Nicholas and built on the site of a very early one, that crowned the summit. The Island rose high above the blue line of the Atlantic, cutting it in two.

Eastward the long, broken line of the Cornish coast spread north and south, wonderfully colored this calm spring day in tones of violet and green, while bay after bay, blue almost as the Mediterranean, touched the gold of the sands with a faint, white rim. Overhead the sea-gulls were circling, uttering their restless mewing cries. The little town to-day was painted in a high key of color, pale and brilliant, with here and there a black, tarred wall, a rosy roof or red-brick chimney, to break with sudden emphasis the surrounding tints of grey and yellow and mauve.

The stir of the sea, the monotonous voice of its many waters, sounded in Ursula's ears; the salt tang of it was upon her lips as she stood there, a slight, rather shabby figure, her dark hair disarranged by the wind and her grey eyes shining.

A motor came swiftly round the corner and halted suddenly close to her. Of its two occupants Ursula was momentarily astonished to recognize the figure of her elder sister, Daphne, accompanied by a young man. It is true that Daphne rarely returned from St. Faith's unaccompanied, but none of their near neighbors possessed such luxuries as motors, and Ursula had never to her knowledge

seen this young man before. Here in the little remote town he appeared almost as conspicuous and unusual a figure as Daphne herself.

He stepped lightly down and opened the door, and Ursula saw that he was tall and slightly built with the fair hair growing, as she perceived when he lifted his hat, thick and strong with a hint of a wave as in some ancient portrait bust. His eyes were of the blue grey that resembles the color of a stormy sea darkened by passing clouds, and his face might, she supposed, have been called effeminate, so carefully drawn was it, but for the touch of dark tan that suggested a recent exposure to fierce desert suns.

Certainly not one of the many brilliant young artists who formed a small, intelligent, rather exclusive colony in St. Faith's, and who had been known on more than one occasion to forsake brushes and paints and journey out to Pentarn to gaze on the reputed loveliness of the rector's eldest daughter. Ursula knew them all by sight at any rate, nor was she ever offended at their ready forgetfulness of herself. This man was not of a type frequently seen at St. Faith's. His aspect seemed to suggest something more sophisticated, as of one accustomed to the life of cities, even of foreign cities.

He stood there now in front of Ursula, eagerly inviting her to get in, while the sun was busily weaving golden strands in his hair, which grew thickly on his brow and was brushed back in a way that suggested a plume.

"Do get in and I'll give you both a lift home," he said, smiling at Ursula.

Ursula hesitated; she had learned not to intrude. Daphne's face could scarcely be called encouraging. But it would have been useless to refuse. Already

her parcels were being kindly but firmly removed from her hands, and were being stowed away in the back of the car. She took her seat in the place indicated, behind her sister.

Daphne looked over her shoulder.

"I forgot you hadn't met each other," she said in her cool, charming voice. "Mr. Willmot, this is my sister Ursula."

Daphne played the part through life of the pretty, charming woman, and so well had it succeeded that she was already able to look back upon a long line of conquests. She was twenty-four but she looked barely twenty. Ursula at twenty-two was often taken for the elder.

They sped swiftly along the road that skirted the top of the town, obtaining fleeting visions of huddled roofs lying in picturesque confusion below them. Soon the little port was left behind and they were going rapidly through the open country, across the bare, unwooded heights that stretched in bleak, blunt lines behind the coast. They passed little groups of grey cottages that looked almost grim in those austere surroundings. Here and there, the rusty skeletons of long disused machinery, together with unlovely mounds of slack, revealed the presence of some once-prosperous mine.

They reached the rectory in what seemed to Ursula an incredibly short space of time. She had enjoyed the swift drive through that buoyant spring air. Mr. Willmot sprang down, helped Daphne to descend, and then turned to come to Ursula's assistance. She was already groping for her parcels.

"Do, please, let me relieve you of some of these!" he said.

"Oh, no, no—I mean—I always carry them." She was confused and embarrassed, wishing she could acquire the cool composure of Daphne, for

whom men and boys had fetched and carried for nearly a decade.

Daphne's brows contracted a little. "Oh, you mustn't trouble, really."

Humphrey Willmot quickly possessed himself of all of Ursula's bulging parcels.

"Did you really contemplate walking home with all these? To an unaccustomed eye you seem to have been going it! Half the stores of St. Faith's must be here!"

"I generally do our weekly shopping on Tuesdays," said Ursula timidly. She was always nervous under the delicate, critical scrutiny of Daphne. Standing there in front of them she secretly acknowledged, without envy, how beautiful they both were. Daphne so rarely found a man to surpass her in height.

"You must come over and see us at the Abbey—we have taken it for the summer. I have seen you in church on two Sundays so you seem already quite an old friend." Willmot smiled—a pleasant, slightly ironical smile, as if wide experience and knowledge had taught him a kind of amused tolerance. "We came down here against the advice of all our friends who prophesied our speedy extinction. But so far we are delighted with it—we don't regret the step in the least."

"Oh, I am so glad you like it," said Ursula, with a sudden warm note of enthusiasm in her voice. "I think it is perfectly lovely at the Abbey, especially just now."

"So do I," said Humphrey, looking pleased. "You must get your sister to bring you over very soon. My mother is the most sociable woman in the world. She is enormously enthusiastic about the Abbey of course, but she wishes we had more neighbors."

"People are always enormously enthusiastic about Pentarn for about three months," said Daphne, smiling. She did not love it at all, and there were even days when she felt a secret, active hatred of it, rebelling with all her youth against its narrowness, its dullness. All very well its beauties for jaded Londoners who came thither in summer for sheer physical rest and refreshment. But to live there, year in and year out, through each long, succeeding, dreary winter, yes, that was indeed to fling away the gifts of youth and beauty. She was wasting her days, her precious young years. Already she was twenty-four. Of course, it didn't matter for people like Humphrey Willmot, who had only to take the first train when they felt bored. Or for people like Ursula who had no ambition and whose life was filled with daily tasks. Daphne was careful never to air these thoughts in public; she knew that discontent is a fatal detriment to beauty and leaves its traces on the most exquisite face. She extracted what enjoyment she could, and hoped. She had been hoping for six, for seven years, for the arrival of that rich and splendid Prince Charming who was to take her away from Pentarn forever.

Had he at last arrived in the person of Humphrey Willmot, the only son of parents whose reputed wealth was enormous, judged by Pentarn standards?

It was the first time that Pentarn Abbey had been let—within her remembrance—to people with a young and marriageable son. Generally it had been taken for the summer by the owners of large, young families. Daphne detested children.

Still Humphrey must be taught that Ursula was unaccustomed to notice, and that it was quite unusual to include her in an invitation. She did not even expect it.

"Won't you come in? There's sure to be tea,"

said Daphne, carelessly. It annoyed her to hear two people waxing enthusiastic over Pentarn.

"No, thanks very much. I must be getting back." Humphrey moved toward the car. "What a perfect evening it is!" His eyes rested upon the long, faintly-colored coast-line, visible through a gap in the wind-tormented trees that afforded the rectory such inadequate protection during the winter storms.

He shook hands first with Daphne, then with Ursula, but it was upon Ursula's palely-colored face that his eyes rested longest.

As they went into the house, down the passage with its covering of worn brown linoleum, Daphne said:

"Is it really necessary for you to look such a beast of burden when you come back from St. Faith's on Tuesdays?"

"Someone must go and fetch the things," said Ursula.

She felt chilled by her sister's tone. Of course, she must have looked odd and shabby. Still Mr. Willmot had been very kind. He had not been so strangely unconscious of her presence as most of Daphne's admirers.

CHAPTER II

THE Rev. Wilfrid Finch, rector of Pentarn, had spent all his married life in that tiny parish overlooking the wild coast of North Cornwall. He had married rather late and was now some years over sixty, his wife being nearly ten years his junior. Their engagement had been a long one, for they had waited until he had obtained a living, if the scanty emoluments derived from Pentarn could be dignified by such a name. He now suffered from ill-health of a pronounced dyspeptic kind, and this accentuated by financial anxieties, which became more acute every succeeding year, had confirmed in him a natural tendency to ill-temper. His mother had been a Cornishwoman, and he had at first been glad enough to go to Pentarn. Mrs. Finch was the daughter of a clergyman whose curate he had once been. She came from London, and was accustomed to a grinding poverty in unclean surroundings, so that the fresh wind-swept fastness of Pentarn seemed to her, for quite two years after her marriage, a singularly desirable place. There was clean, pure air; there were boisterous, invigorating sea-breezes; her health improved. Then the babies began to arrive in rapid succession. First there was Daphne, prettiest and daintiest of children, who was still the idol of her mother's heart. Mrs. Finch would still have been perfectly willing to sacrifice herself as well as her three other surviving children upon the altar of her first-born. Ursula, the second daughter, seemed never to have had any childhood at all, so early had it been impressed upon her that she must "set an example," and "take care of baby while mamma was out of the room"—tasks relegated as a rule to the eldest member of a family. But

Daphne from her earliest years was the "spoiled beauty" in embryo. After Ursula, there was a sad gap caused by the death of two babies in infancy. Then came Nicholas, the only surviving son, a wild little creature with black hair and eyes, and a passionate temper. After him came another gap, caused by precisely the same misfortune as the first, and then the last and youngest child, another girl called Ruth, was born. She was now fifteen years of age, being four years younger than Nicholas. By this time Mrs. Finch's single ambition was to secure a brilliant marriage for Daphne. She left the whole task of housekeeping—which at the rectory included a great deal also of the housework—to Ursula with such assistance as Ruth and a young village girl, called Jenny, were able to give her.

Whatever of order and management there was at the rectory was due solely to Ursula's continued and untiring efforts. She did her work competently and almost secretly. She ordered, she weighed, she contrived; she kept the books down to their lowest possible limit, and submitted to being called stingy by Daphne because she spent so little, and abused by her father because she spent too much. She accepted without complaint the graceless rôle of Cinderella. People were inclined to overlook Ursula. Yet she was very pretty in a charming, unobtrusive fashion, with her small pale face, her dark hair, and shining grey eyes. Locally, she was supposed to be clever, because she read and studied in those scanty moments of leisure that were sandwiched between her interminable hours of work. But she had no attractive accomplishments such as Daphne possessed. Daphne could play and sing charmingly, and a great deal had been spent upon her tuition. Several of the musical curates in the neighborhood of St. Faith's had fallen desperately

in love with her, but Daphne had no intention of marrying a curate. Her mother's fate alone would, she believed, have been a sufficient deterrent. And, in any case, she meant to fly higher than that! Ursula on the other hand would, her sister felt, make a pattern wife for an impecunious clergyman. Cooking, and planning, and sewing, and scheming to make a three-years-old frock look like new! Daphne dismissed Ursula's future with a shrug. It would scarcely have made her anxious if she had known her father's financial position as accurately as Ursula did. She would only have shrugged her shoulders and said, perhaps, *"Après moi le déluge!"*

She intended to marry Humphrey Willmot. He was the most interesting and the best-looking of all the rich men she had ever seen. She liked his quiet, ironical face, his charming blue-grey eyes, his fair thick hair. The Willmots were wealthy people and adored their only son. He had no definite profession, but he was a student and had traveled a great deal, and had written several books on art.

The very next morning after their meeting with Humphrey in St. Faith's, the desired invitation to tea at the Abbey arrived at the rectory. Hitherto, only formal calls had been exchanged between Mrs. Finch and Mrs. Willmot. Both Daphne and Ursula were included in the invitation.

"But of course Ursula won't dare to go," said Daphne. Mr. Willmot must be taught that it was never necessary to invite Ursula—she was so much happier with her sewing-machine or her cooking pots. She suffered agonies of shyness when she went anywhere; it was really far kinder to leave her at home. Besides, she was too busy to indulge in unnecessary dissipations—even those very mild dissipations that Pentarn could offer. Ruth was too young, and Nicholas, with his rude, boisterous man-

ners, was, thank heaven, at Oxford! Daphne was a little ashamed of her only brother, she felt that he did her small credit. Nor was he a person that could be easily hidden. His ready tongue often betrayed her, for his young vision was acute. She and her mother had both opposed the plan of sending him to college. But Nicholas, wild as he was, was determined to go, and his energy and brilliance won the day. He had obtained a valuable scholarship and was able to pay almost the whole of his own expenses.

The drought ended suddenly on the very morning of the day when the expedition to the Abbey was to take place. Grey mists blotted out the coast-line that faded like a spectre. A thin rain blew in from the sea, and a high wind whistled among the trees that fringed the rectory garden. Clouds colored like Indian ink traveled across the sky in swift squadrons. The May day was as chilly and unpromising as it could be, and yet with it all the sense and promise of spring were strangely apparent. No sickly herald of weakling blossom and fruit, but the stir of a vigorous, passionate young life that told of steady growth, and of the strong secret work that was being accomplished everywhere, unhindered, organized, inexorable. No fierce damaging westerly gales, salt as the Atlantic breakers themselves, could materially arrest for an hour that process that was going forward to its inevitable goal.

But Daphne watched the weather with a rueful eye. How tiresome that it should rain just to-day! Impossible to wear that new, grey cloth dress and broad-brimmed hat of grey straw. She and her mother would have to walk to the Abbey enveloped in mackintoshes, and Mrs. Finch would certainly don an unsightly pair of goloshes to be left in the hall on arrival.

"Where is your sister?" asked Humphrey, when the first greetings had been duly exchanged, and Daphne tried not to believe that there was any hint of disappointment in his tone.

"She couldn't come to-day. She hardly ever goes anywhere. Ursula is a regular recluse!" Daphne smiled prettily. She was looking really beautiful to-day; the soft damp air had blown a delicious color into her face. Her small black hat revealed just enough of her hair, which was so fair as to be almost colorless, and which was perhaps the most enchanting thing about her. That lint-colored hair is often seen on Cornish children, accompanied, as Daphne's was, by large, dark blue eyes, fringed heavily with black lashes. What impression was she making upon Humphrey Willmot, who had perhaps seen beautiful women in most of the capitals of Europe? But his eager question about Ursula had troubled her serenity a little.

"Oh, you mustn't really let her indulge in such misanthropic tastes," he said; "she's altogether too young!"

Mrs. Finch sat beside her hostess on the sofa. The contrast between them was almost pitiful. They were perhaps of about the same age, but the rector's wife looked by a decade the older of the two. She had once been pretty enough, but all trace of comeliness had long left her. In her early fifties she looked old, tired, and fretful. The birth of eight children, the early deaths of four of them, the perpetual struggle to obtain everything she wanted for Daphne with an altogether inadequate income, her husband's difficult temper, had all contributed to embitter her. She sat there envying the calm opulent air of Mrs. Willmot, who looked as if she could have cheerfully faced and met the most exacting demands of importunate tradesmen! When

tea came in Mr. Willmot made his appearance, a tall, benign-looking, elderly man, grey-haired but fully as well-preserved as his wife. Surely a man who never lost his temper, thereby upsetting the whole household. Perhaps his wealth had been exaggerated in Pentarn, among a population so little accustomed to incomes that ran into five figures. His tastes were obviously simple, for at tea he ate nothing but some dry toast. Prudence perhaps enjoined this austerity. He spoke but little, yet he looked amiable. Once or twice his keen eyes traveled from Daphne to his son.

There was an atmosphere of mutual devotion among these three people which struck even strangers, and Mrs. Finch did not fail to perceive it and also to envy it. Humphrey had an admirable manner with his parents. He was affectionate, attentive, and slightly ironical, even rallying them occasionally on their more obvious foibles.

"You are very courageous to eat those cakes, Miss Finch," said Mr. Willmot.

"Do not, please, listen to him—he is envying you passionately," interposed Humphrey. He held out the plate and was enchanted to see her take a second one with the tips of her dainty fingers. He liked to see slender, well-cared-for hands.

"Wait till you are sixty, Humphrey!"

"I hope to resemble you in all things when I am, except in your partiality for dry toast!"

The elder Willmot's eyes twinkled.

"You are indeed a dutiful son!"

Mrs. Willmot watched them with a tender and attentive approbation. These two men were her whole world, making it for her an extremely pleasant and desirable place. She liked their mutual attitude of understanding, tolerance, and sympathy. So many sons were odious to their fathers. But

Humphrey was a perfect son. If he would only marry!

In reply to one of Mrs. Finch's slightly disconnected remarks she said: "Oh, does your daughter sing? How charming! Humphrey adores music—he really plays quite well. We must persuade her to come over and dine here one night, and then perhaps she will sing for us."

"I should simply love to," said Daphne. She bestowed a frank smile upon Mrs. Willmot for this ready invitation. In spite of its unpromising beginning the afternoon was shaping well. The hospitality of the Abbey was not to begin and end with this solitary invitation to tea.

"Is it not the office of a siren to sing?" Mr. Willmot inquired of his wife when their guests had departed, and Humphrey had announced his intention of accompanying them across the park.

"Oh, what do you mean, Robin?"

"Just exactly what I say." He sat beside her on the sofa and took her hand in his, stroking it.

"Confess she is very pretty and charming. And what an odiously dull life she must have! They have hardly a penny to bless themselves with, and I hear these girls do nearly all the housework."

"I don't think Miss Finch's hands show any signs of housework!"

"You are always so sarcastic about women, Robin. I am sure that is where Humphrey gets it from."

"I am always studying devices to put him on his guard. Fortunately, none of you women realize what an easy prey a mere man is. But this girl is very lovely. Let us hope for Humphrey's sake that she sings out of tune!"

"You are horrible. I have taken an enormous fancy to her. I mean to ask her to come and stay with us in London."

"Do, my dear. Humphrey always conceives an immediate prejudice against your eligible maidens."

"He is nearly thirty. You ought to wish him to marry."

"I do. But not Miss Finch. I don't detect the signs of a good wife in her. You know I want something superlative for our boy."

He bent down and kissed her, knowing that his last remark would make a special appeal to her. Then he left the room, retiring to solitude in his own study. Much later he perceived his son coming across the park under a dripping umbrella.

"He must have walked all the way home with them," was his mental comment.

The thought perturbed him a little.

But to Daphne the visit had been—considered as the opening move in the game—a distinct success. Despite the torrents of rain Humphrey had not attempted to leave them till the rectory gate had been reached. He had even paused there, with an obvious desire to detain them, to inquire the date of the church tower. Thirteenth century! Daphne was glib in her reply. He looked up at its mellowed greyness, powdered with golden lichens, with a vague approval in his eyes.

"You must come to see us. Come whenever you like," said Mrs. Finch.

Without exchanging a word with her daughter on the subject, she knew perfectly well what hopes and dreams now possessed her mind.

"Thank you very much, indeed," said Humphrey.

He glanced up at the oblong grey stone house that was architecturally so ugly and yet had qualities of strength and austerity that seemed to be at one with its harsh setting upon these bleak wind-swept heights. The place held a kind of fascination for him, it was so different from anything comprised within his own experience. One could imagine

tragedies being enacted there, but never a light, witty, modern comedy. The spirit of place was strongly perceptible in this little remote parsonage of North Cornwall. Yet he sincerely pitied those two girls for having to spend the whole of their youth in such unlovely, penurious surroundings.

CHAPTER III

THERE were visitors at the rectory—an unusual occurrence, for Mrs. Finch had no reputation for hospitality of a promiscuous kind, and Daphne preferred to conduct her ceaseless flirtations as far as possible from disapproving paternal eyes. But on this particular afternoon of early May, Mrs. Burton and her sister, Madame Garroni, had motored over from the Castle, a palatial modern mansion that commanded a proud and prominent position on the coast, two miles away. It was pretentious, modern, hideously inartistic, and was an eyesore, but Mr. Burton, who had caused it to be erected with some of his newly-acquired wealth, preferred to allude to it as a landmark.

The Burtons had once lived in more modest fashion in Pentarn, and in those rather remote days Mrs. Finch had been in a position to patronize them, but the ups and downs of life had materially changed their respective positions, and invitations to the Castle did not now find their way to the rectory with any frequency. Mr. Burton had been somewhat suddenly enriched through the death of an uncle. His wife hailed from Penzance, where her father had possessed a small retail business, a fact which she had found it convenient to forget. Nevertheless, he had given his two plain daughters a good education, and he had been bitterly annoyed when the elder one, at an age that should have encouraged her to listen to wiser counsels, suddenly became engaged to an Italian engineer who was visiting the Cornish mines that summer. She had been living in Rome for the past nine years, and

was now on a visit to her sister at the Castle for the first time.

Mrs. Burton, who was the younger of the two, was a highly prosperous-looking matron of thirty-eight. She had one son, a boy of nineteen, whose name was Stanley and upon whom all her hopes were concentrated. He did not accompany her to-day, for she knew that he admired Daphne, and she feared that despite the difference in their ages he might be caught in her toils. Madame Garroni's lot in life was very different. Four years older than her sister, she had married much later, and she had never really accustomed herself to her life in Rome. She had been attracted by Garroni's face, his dark eyes, his pleasant, courteous manners, and she had married him in haste, agreeing, without demur, to the conditions his mother insisted upon imposing. But he was practically without fortune; his income consisted of his earnings, which, judged by English standards, were small, and he found his wife's £500 a year a very useful asset. They lived in a none too convenient flat in Rome, together with his old mother, and a young man called Mario, who was Guido Garroni's nephew. Madame Garroni soon discovered that she was neither expected nor encouraged to go into society. There were no tea-parties and reunions such as she had enjoyed in Penzance. Her acquaintance was limited to her husband's friends, and the only Englishwomen she knew were placed exactly as she herself was placed, having married as she had done into the Italian bourgeoisie. They were not as a rule discontented with their lot. There were disadvantages of course. A woman was expected to occupy herself much more with domestic affairs, with the care of her own children, with the necessary cooking and sewing. The smart and experienced English nurse was found

only in wealthy aristocratic circles in Rome. Madame Garroni had always felt that with her income in England she could have had a small comfortable house in the country with an establishment of at least two servants. But her Italian marriage took the control of her money completely out of her own hands, and she was dismayed to find how much of it was swallowed up in the annual rent of their flat. Her husband also tabooed unnecessary traveling, and this was the first time he had permitted her to come home and exhibit her two little girls.

All that she saw of the spacious, hideous Castle filled her with envy. Of course, one missed the sunshine, the brilliant, almost exaggerated light, but how restful were the grey English skies, the green, flower-strewn fields, the long blue line of the Atlantic. She considered that Mrs. Burton led a life of almost slothful ease. There were a great many servants at the Castle, and they performed their tasks with a meticulous, almost mechanical, accuracy, very unlike the Italian conception of domestic service. She, herself, had very little help in Rome; sometimes they were without a servant for weeks at a time. It was Mrs. Burton who suggested that she should take a nursery-governess back with her, one who could take entire charge, do all the sewing, and give the little girls their first lessons. Such a person, she alleged, could be found very cheaply indeed, much more cheaply than a regular nurse. It was by inspiration Mrs. Burton felt that she had suddenly thought how admirably Ursula Finch would suit her sister. The very girl! An excellent person, to whom the prospect of traveling abroad would doubtless appeal in a very special manner. They lost no time in ordering the motor to take them to the Pentarn rectory.

The door was opened by the slatternly Jenny,

fresh from scrubbing the kitchen. They were shown into the drawing-room and there they waited for about ten minutes, while Mrs. Finch performed those changes in her toilette which the occasion seemed to demand. Useless to call upon Daphne to go down to them, and Ursula was engaged in baking the bread, and therefore must not be interrupted.

"They must be very hard-up," observed Madame Garroni, looking round the shabby room with appraising eyes. "I should think they would jump at the idea. What did Stanley mean by saying that we should offend them?"

"He always says that Daphne, the eldest girl, is sure to marry someone of importance, and that Mr. Finch is as proud as Lucifer although he is so poor. But I do not see how she can ever meet anyone of importance in Pentarn. We have really almost given up coming here or even asking them." Mrs. Burton's tone was acid. She had an idea that their old neighbors were still inclined to despise them for their humble beginnings, although the opulence and magnificence of the Castle were a byword in the district. Damaged titles found their way thither; impecunious bachelors enjoyed its free food of the first quality. The motors were numerous; the golf-links beyond praise. The rise of the Burtons had been of sudden but continued growth.

Mrs. Burton had none of her son's diffidence on the subject, and when Mrs. Finch appeared she broached it without delay.

"My sister, Madame Garroni, is returning to Rome in a few weeks, and she wants a nursery-governess for Alda and Rosina. I thought perhaps your second girl—it would be such a charming opportunity for her to see something of the world!"

Mrs. Finch's thin face hardened a little.

"I couldn't possibly spare Ursula," she replied,

without hesitation and with a hint of offence in her tone.

"We feel that she would have been so absolutely trustworthy. I could have left my children with her with such confidence! I have a delightful home to offer her, although, of course, it is not so grand as the Castle, and I would have given her twenty-five pounds a year. That for a girl who has never been in a situation of the kind before is really an excellent salary."

Madame Garroni spoke with a certain eagerness. She had made up her mind that there would be no difficulty; since the Finches were so poor they would certainly jump at her offer. She would get her cheap —and Arabella Garroni had acquired habits of thrift. She economized, as so many people do, in ways that affected others but seldom deranged her own comfort. How could Mrs. Finch refuse when her means were so small, her family so large?

"I couldn't possibly spare her," repeated Mrs. Finch, with singular determination.

"We may see her, may we not?" suggested Mrs. Burton.

"I am afraid she is too busy this afternoon. But in any case Wilfrid and I always settle everything —we don't allow our children any independence. We feel it is safer." She closed her lips in a thin hard line.

Mrs. Burton suppressed a smile. She had heard stories of Daphne. Daphne had no fancy for being caged. It was a mercy Stanley had been so reasonable, the sight of the rectory, its shabbiness, its poverty, had sufficed to put him off. He had been known to admit diffidently, but without shame, that he knew he was a snob. But he had never revealed even to his mother the delicate snubbing he had once received at the hands of the eldest Miss Finch.

Mrs. Burton, like Mr. Willmot, felt that Daphne as a daughter-in-law might leave everything to be desired.

But Ursula! There was a girl in a thousand. Steady, conscientious, thoroughly domesticated, disciplined, snubbed at home and supposed to be even averse to amusement, she would have been a real treasure. Madame Garroni had constant trouble with her Italian servants. She did not understand their mentality, and made no effort to study their temperaments. But she accurately guessed that she would have found, and kept, a slave in Ursula Finch.

"You won't think it over, and perhaps consult Mr. Finch?" Madame Garroni made another effort.

"My husband would be even more opposed to the plan than I am. We are both against all this foreign traveling. I have certainly never felt the need of it myself, and from all I can see it simply unfits girls for their useful home-life."

The two sisters rose. Madame Garroni was plump to breathlessness. Her figure was singularly shapeless, and her loud voice and provincial accent enhanced the touch of commonness in her appearance.

"I'm very sorry," she said; "she would have had a comfortable place, and, as I say, she would have seen a bit of the world. She would have been treated as one of the family." She shook hands with a determinedly untempted Mrs. Finch.

As they drove away, Mrs. Finch said crossly to herself:

"The idea! As if I'd let Ursula go and be nurse to that odious woman's brats!"

She went in search of her daughter. The bread had been made, and she found Ursula up in the attic work-room, sewing. Pieces of white silk lay on

the table; she was fashioning a blouse for Daphne.

She was looking tired, and as if she had only emerged from one tedious task to take up another. On strenuous days Ursula's looks were always under eclipse. Small wonder that her pale little face, her black hair and grey eyes were seldom noticed beside Daphne's showy brilliance. Only one man, careless, smiling, had stopped for an amazed second to discern and contemplate the "pilgrim soul in her." That man was Humphrey Willmot.

"Those people from the Castle came to ask you to go back to Rome with Madame Garroni to look after her children. They offered the magnificent salary of twenty-five pounds a year, which is probably what Mrs. Burton pays her kitchenmaid! You were to be treated like one of the family, if you please! Of course, I utterly declined."

The girl looked up from her sewing. She was heavy eyed, as if she had had for a considerable time past too little sleep.

"I should have liked to go to Italy," she said.

"Don't argue," said Mrs. Finch; "it is quite settled that I can not spare you." She glanced significantly at the white silk. "Your duty lies here."

Ursula's needle pursued its course with a deft regularity that suggested long apprenticeship. Her thoughts were full of the extraordinary chance that had come in her way. It seemed a pity to have to refuse. She had never seen any cities except London, and she had only been there once as a child. Rome had an enchanting sound. But it was quite true, she could not possibly be spared. Her hands were too full. What she earned would not suffice to keep a second servant. Her eyes were very bright now; there was an odd lump in her throat that hurt her.

To go away—far away! To see the gold and blue of the south, the flowered fields and hills of Italy, the purple snow-crowned Apennines, the wide rivers flowing past ancient cities whose very walls were full of the glamor of romance and history! She wanted to cry out: Let me go! Let me go! But one glance at her mother's face deterred her, checking the dream. She couldn't be spared. Of course not! Who would take her place, and cook and sew, and teach Ruth? Certainly not Daphne. Ursula was unconscious of any vanity when she assured herself that the interior economy of Pentarn rectory would suffer complete and immediate disruption if she were to leave it.

When her mother had gone she presently rose, put aside her work, and slipped out of the house. She felt a sudden agonized need of fresh air, but with Ursula it was always bought at a price, and she had to make up for the wasted moments by sacrificing some of her much-needed sleep.

She left the rectory garden, crossed the road, and followed a path that dipped through high-banked lanes to the cliffs. She brushed past tall crimson fox-gloves that were just beginning to flower. The broad white hemlock blossoms made abrupt pale patches amid the green. It was a pretty time of the year, when the ferns showed their first delicate, polished leaves. Even the very walls seemed to blossom, with their torrents of rose-pink valerian. Now she could see the blue bay with its dark rocks, its strip of pale shining sand. Flocks of sea-gulls rested upon the rocks or flew low over the water. She looked at her watch and made a rapid calculation. Yes, she could spare half an hour, the air would revive her. She made her way to a favorite seat, from which she could see not only the ocean but the glimmering coast-line spreading away to the

east, all green and gold but fading to purple in the distance, as well as the inland landscape, sparsely wooded but full of delicious, varying lights and shadows.

As she drew near she saw to her disappointment that the seat was already occupied. A man was sitting there smoking, his back turned toward her. It was too late to withdraw, and he must have heard her light step, for he turned his head quickly and she came face to face with Humphrey Willmot. Was he waiting for Daphne? That was the first thought that leaped unbidden to her mind.

"Miss Finch! What luck! I hate sitting and looking at beautiful things alone."

Ursula approached timidly.

"I did not think I should find any one here."

"I will go away at once!" He flung his cigarette-end into the bracken and stood there smiling.

"Oh, please, don't go," said Ursula, confused. "I mean—so few people come here."

"This is one of your hermit's haunts, I suppose?" he said good-naturedly; "your sister tells me that you are a recluse. So, if you really want to be alone on this divine evening I will go away!"

"But I don't in the least want to be alone," said Ursula.

He glanced at her; her shy embarrassment was so very different from Daphne's cool composure. She wasn't beautiful, of course, like her sister, and he felt that she must sometimes suffer by comparison, but she was very charming-looking. He preferred her to Daphne although she was so obviously inarticulate. She wanted waking up! Awakened she might prove extremely attractive. Already he took an indolent detached interest in the second Miss Finch.

They sat down on the seat and for a few minutes neither spoke.

"I suppose you are very much attached to Pentarn?" he said at last.

"I suppose I am. I have always lived here. I have hardly ever been away."

She thought of Rome, of the chance offered that very day; her eyes grew troubled.

"Some day you will go," he ventured to prophesy. "If you want a thing very much you know you can generally obtain it. And though Pentarn is charming I can't imagine anyone wishing to spend a lifetime here. In winter it must be dreary beyond words."

"Yes, it is dreary," assented Ursula.

"I have not spent the winter in England since I reached years of discretion, which I roughly estimate as eight years ago, just after I left Oxford."

"Where do you go?" she asked.

"Oh, I wander as the fancy takes me—Italy, Tunis, Algeria. Egypt is charming but a trifle too fashionable now. Madeira—the West Indies." He enumerated them carelessly.

"It must be wonderful," said Ursula.

She could feel the wind beating across Pentarn in the winter, and hear the great waves breaking on the rocks. A restless world, never still, never silent. Sometimes, at night especially, it got on one's nerves. You wanted to cry out, to tell it to be quiet. You were too close to the terror of the sea, its great tragedies. You knew perhaps that even at that moment the coast was being strewn with wrecks; you could almost hear the cry of drowning mariners, sinking in that cruel, ice-cold water. She thought inconsequently of a dead sea-gull she had found once in the garden, frozen in the storm. It had looked strangely discolored as it lay there on the snow.

Yes, the winter at Pentarn held a tragic violence.

"I have just had an opportunity of going to Rome," she said suddenly, for the kindness of his eyes encouraged her to speak. "I would rather though that you did not say anything about it. My mother was offended, and I think she would not like me to mention it. There is a lady, Madame Garroni, who is staying at the Castle with her sister Mrs. Burton, and she wanted me to go back with her as nursery-governess to her two children. But my mother can't spare me—I have so much to do at home."

"Of course, I won't speak of it. But it does not sound a very attractive position."

"It was a chance of seeing Italy. I have always longed to go there."

"Do you know anything about this Madame Garroni?"

"No. I suppose I must have seen her when I was a little girl, before her marriage. She and Mrs. Burton both came from Penzance. She offered me twenty-five pounds a year."

"My dear Miss Finch!" He threw up his hands with a gesture of dismay.

"I shouldn't have cost them anything then, and I could have sent nearly all of it home."

"But surely there isn't any need?" He pictured Daphne, daintily clad.

Ursula's mind was full of those unpaid bills that lay untouched in a drawer. Bills for Daphne's clothes, for Daphne's music, bills that were left unpaid because Daphne's journeys and cabs swallowed up all the little store of ready cash. Some day, of course, they would be paid when Daphne made that rich marriage. Ursula raised dark grey eyes to his. He thought they possessed the deep opaque softness of velvet. Surely wonderful eyes in any face.

"Anyhow, it's been refused. And, of course, I do see it was out of the question."

"May I say I'm glad?" he said. "You might have been let in for so much more than you expected."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"Those middle-class ménages abroad might prove trying to a person brought up differently."

"But Madame Garroni is English."

"And probably can't manage Italian servants. You might have been made a perfect drudge of all work. Who are these Burton people?"

"They live at that great new house on Tremin-ster cliff. It is called the Castle."

"That place? But he's a retired grocer, isn't he?"

"I don't quite know. They are very rich now."

Ursula glanced at her watch. More than the allotted half hour had slipped by. It was time to go back and superintend the cooking of the supper. She rose.

"Oh, you're not going, are you?" said Humphrey. "It's quite early, you know."

"I'm afraid I ought to be going."

"Do you often come here? I mean, is this a favorite haunt of yours?"

"I come sometimes, like this evening, when I want some fresh air."

"Then will you come again?" said Humphrey.

"Yes," said Ursula.

"To-morrow?" he inquired, a trifle persistently.

To-morrow? Yes, it would be Sunday. She was not allowed to sew, and most of the food was already cooked.

"Yes, I hope to come here to-morrow."

"Miss Finch, should you perfectly hate finding me here again?"

"Hate it?" She looked up and laughed. "Why I should be delighted of course. Only—Daphne is going to tea at the Abbey to-morrow, perhaps you would rather be there."

She made the suggestion simply, with no ulterior thought. She took Daphne's conquests for granted.

"My mother is always giving tea-parties. I spend my life in avoiding them."

"If I can not come do not please think it is my fault," said Ursula, satisfied now that for some strange inexplicable reason he really wished to return and find her here on the following evening. "I am not always able to get away. Sometimes there are little things to be done."

The tide was going out. Little waves lisped against the sands, breaking into delicate lace-like frills of foam. They seemed to retreat almost reluctantly. The bay was colored like a shining sapphire, touched with silver lights. Overhead the restless gulls mewed shrilly, as if in nervous fear. Small fishing-boats rocked idly, the sunlight illuminating their brown sails. Ursula felt the beauty of it all as if she were seeing it for the first time with new eyes. In the distance the green summit of the Island rose against the blue of sea and sky.

She hurried home feeling curiously happy. And to-morrow there would be perhaps just such another day, just such another meeting.

CHAPTER IV

It is doubtful whether Ursula Finch had ever since her childhood enjoyed an hour of real irresponsible joyousness. Always since her meagre education had come to an end she had been occupied with tasks, too heavy and too numerous for her physical strength. As time went on and the financial crisis at the rectory became more acute, Ursula did more and more of the housework and cooking. She had not much help from the raw girl who was now their only servant and who was able to do little more than the actual scrubbing and cleaning. Her hands were broadened and roughened, and once they had been as slim and white as Daphne's own. Mrs. Finch and Daphne proffered no assistance. Little Ruth, now a sad-looking girl of fifteen, long-legged and short-frocked and more or less down-at-heels and out-at-elbows, did what she could to help her sister. She slept with her, and knew at what hour on dark winter mornings Ursula would arise and begin the day's work. No one ever thanked her. If she failed there was a swift sharp reprimand forthcoming, generally from her father. "Ursula—this pudding's burnt—it isn't fit to eat! Such waste—ruining good food!" And when the kitchen and household tasks were more or less achieved there was sewing to be done for Daphne. Mending Daphne's things was no sinecure, and there were blouses to be made. Ursula stitched till she could hardly see.

When Daphne announced that she was to take her music to the Abbey that afternoon because Mrs. Willmot and her son both wished to hear her sing, Ursula had to restrain herself from saying that Mr. Willmot would not be there. But it would have

been fatal to mention it. Daphne would speedily have found some means to prevent her sister from going out on the cliffs that evening. She would have been annoyed had she known of their meeting yesterday. It had been accidental, but to-day it would not be accidental. Ursula was looking forward to it with an eager delight. She said nothing, and it was with a sigh of relief that she beheld Daphne starting Abbeyward at half-past four with a roll of music under her arm.

The weather had changed. There had been rain in the morning and no one from the Abbey had been present in church. Perhaps they had gone to St. Faith's, which was scarcely farther from them than Pentarn. The vicar there was High Church in his views, and perhaps the Willmots preferred that to the definitely evangelical services that were held at Pentarn. By the time Ursula was ready to go the sky had cleared, but a strong wind was still blowing. Ursula needed fresh air; she had spent an hour teaching in the Sunday-school before the morning service, and after luncheon she had written letters for her father and put his evening sermon ready for him. She would have to be in her accustomed place in church at half-past six. Daphne was the only one who dared refuse to attend any of the services. Still she had a good hour in front of her.

She lifted her face as she came in view of the sea, to feel the full, rich sweep of the wind as it blew in from the Atlantic, brackish with the waves and full of the odor of those long, dark, shiny ropes of seaweed that they flung upon the beach. Quickly it brought the color back to her face. It was the wind of spring, young, eager, adventurous. She walked down the path toward the cliff bending her head a little. A sudden curve brought her sharply to the place where she had met Humphrey the evening be-

fore. He was already there, and her heart gave a sudden throb of relief. She had not realized until then how greatly she had feared that he might fail her.

Had Ursula seen and known more men she would not perhaps have found him so wonderful. Good-looking she must always have thought him, with his fair hair growing thick and close to his head, his grey-blue eyes with their note of ironical laughter, the well-cut features, the small, shapely head.

She became tongue-tied. She was so glad to be with him again that her very gladness made her dumb. Humphrey was, however, a ready talker, and seeing her embarrassment, which he did not in the least understand and attributing it perhaps to her love of seclusion and to those misanthropic tastes at which Daphne had hinted, he chattered away now to set her at her ease. He talked about the change in the weather, and remarked how splendid the sea looked to-day, rough and dark and many-colored, and breaking into silver spray against the rocks. Then he spoke of his travels, of what he intended to do next winter. He had acquired that habit of intimate observation so frequent in the man who travels and writes. If a scene appealed to him he could almost unconsciously photograph it upon his brain in all its details. It would remain in his mind like a color-photograph, sharply delineated and curiously accurate. Just then he was thinking that he should always remember Ursula Finch as she sat there beside him in the narrow path that rimmed the green Cornish cliff, and that she would appear slight, shabby, graceful, with dark hair, fine as silk, and grey eyes gazing demurely beneath black lashes, against a background of greenish sea and colorless pale sky. He thought

too that he should like to be able to summon up this portrait of her at will; to set her down, as it were, in front of him, an individual, rather arresting picture, forming part of the Cornish landscape as he would always remember it.

"It doesn't bore you to hear of places you've never seen?" he said suddenly, breaking off in his description of Souk-Ahras, known to the ancients as Tagaste, the birthplace of St. Augustine.

"Oh, no, I love it. I often think of what it must be like away from Pentarn."

"Still you must get attached to a place you've always lived in," said the Rolling Stone cheerfully. "I'm a regular nomad, and it's the life I like best. I couldn't imagine, for instance, settling down for life in a place like Pentarn."

He laughed and Ursula laughed too. His good-humored gaiety was infectious.

"But you do like it, don't you?" he asked.

"Yes, yes," she eagerly assured him, "but one has dreams, you know, of other things—and the freedom!"

"Forgive me," he said. "I know you must sometimes feel the narrowness of it. Why, what can you find to do?"

"To do!" she echoed, gazing at him now in undisguised amazement; "why to-day I'm having a simply splendid holiday! You see on Sundays there is no cooking—I prepared the food yesterday. And I'm not allowed to sew, so except for the Sunday-school and services and writing a few letters for papa I am free all day. Sometimes on other days I sit up sewing till ever so late, and then I must be down at six or I should never get through the work, and everything would go wrong. There's a lot to do in a house like ours!"

She had no intention of divulging even this much of her daily life, but she wanted him to know that at least there was no scope for idleness at the rectory. His sympathetic, interested attitude seemed to invite confidences. Now as he listened his face fell.

"Why, you don't mean to say that you do the actual work?" he blurted out, and he looked from her soft, pale face to her roughened hands, a little reddened and coarsened. He had an insensate desire, which he immediately repressed, to raise them each in turn to his lips. Poor little, brave, unconquered hands!

"But of course I do. Not the hard scrubbing—Jenny does that, though often I have to show her how. But the cooking, the mending, and the dusting—I have to do nearly all that. The days are too short and then one gets tired. So tired that you feel you can't go on, and you'd give almost anything to spend one whole day in bed! But you remember the washing up, and the putting everything straight for the next day, so you just go on, and then somehow Sunday comes to give you breathing time."

"I do believe you are a heroine," said Humphrey Willmot. His voice held a warm, enthusiastic sound.

Ursula colored, she was unused to praise. "I'm not at all, only things must be done," she said simply.

Willmot looked genuinely shocked. He was accustomed to dainty, leisured women, cultivated, accomplished, the women in short of his own world. But Ursula Finch, who was little better than a slave, a drudge, touched a chord in his heart that was not a selfish one. He felt sorry for her, and the pity he felt was like a warm wave of feeling in his veins.

And Daphne had called this poor, little, pale, over-worked Cinderella a recluse!

"I wish I could tell you what I think of you," he

said very gravely, but with a hint of tenderness in his voice that thrilled her. "Haven't you really any one to help you?"

"There's Jenny of course, but she's lazy and rather stupid. Ruth does what she can, but I won't let her do much because she has a weak back. Besides she must do her lessons, she's too young to give them up. I have so little time for teaching her now."

"So you teach her, too?"

Ursula nodded. "When I have time. Still she's very good at working alone. I make her read a great deal."

He was struck by all lack of reference to Daphne.

"I oughtn't perhaps to have told you all this," she continued; "one ought to keep one's own private affairs locked up." She turned her head a little from him, and he could only see that pale pure line of her profile against the background of stormy sea. Lifted like that it seemed to possess a kind of indomitable pride that forbade compassion. She had valiant stuff in her, this child!

"But I like to know—I like to hear. My silly adventures at Souk-Ahras must have sounded simply absurd to you."

"No, they didn't. They took me into another world, out of Pentarn." She raised frank, grey eyes to his.

"Well, I hope some day you'll see that other world!"

"I might be glad to come back again. I should like not to hate it."

"Ah, so you do hate it?"

"I think because I want a holiday. I feel tired and nervous."

"I'm not surprised," he observed grimly; "but is

it impossible, Miss Finch? I mean—couldn't it be managed?"

She shook her head. "There's no one to take my place. They'd all be miserably uncomfortable left only to Jenny."

"And I think they ought to be made to endure their discomfort for a few weeks."

Ursula was silent. He knew nothing then of her father's temper when things went awry, especially at meals. Well, she couldn't talk about that, even to him. She did not blame her father, she knew exactly all he had to worry him, and how wretched he was under that ever-increasing burden of debt. Mr. Willmot could easily hear the gossip of the village if he wished to learn further details about them.

"It's so confoundedly selfish of them!" he added indignantly.

It struck her as strange that there was actually a sound of anger in his voice.

"Oh, you mustn't say—you mustn't think that, you know," she cried eagerly. "I shouldn't like to give you a wrong impression."

"If I have that impression, my dear Miss Finch, it's not on account of anything you have said. It's from what I've seen since I came to Pentarn."

"But you've seen so little of any of us. And the people here are nearly all Daphne's friends, not mine!"

Daphne's friends—yes, had he known it, this prince among men, he was the only one who had ever taken any notice of herself in preference to Daphne. He, of more worth than all, had been the solitary, wonderful exception. He had stopped, as it were, to pity her with the kind of wholesome, understanding, friendly compassion that could never wound. But it was a dangerous experiment for a

young man to make. It aroused in Ursula's heart a sense of passionate gratitude. For despite her humility she knew that she possessed gifts that had been denied to Daphne. She had—although of this she was scarcely aware—starved intellectual talents that she had little leisure to nourish. She had no means to buy the books she wished to read. Those in her father's study—shabby standard works growing yellow with years, the novels and poems of the mid-nineteenth century and even a few earlier ones—she had read diligently from cover to cover. Yes, from Keats to Francis Thompson. There was nothing later than Dickens in the whole collection except that solitary, prized volume of Francis Thompson. She did not think any one had looked inside it except herself. Some rare visitor to the rectory had left it behind. And there were things in it to stir the heart. He spoke a different language from the rest, different from Tennyson, suave and melodious; different from Browning, rough, passionate, often unmusical, but how beautiful! A touch of Keats in the splendor of the language; here and there something that moved you like Shelley with its unexpected wonder, only differing utterly in its profound, dogmatic spirituality from anything Shelley ever wrote. But Milton, yes, he was a descendant of Milton in his attempts to open the very heavens to you—the same bewildering grandeur. Only always himself. The critics compared him to Crashaw, but there was, alas, no copy of Crashaw old or new at Pentarn.

Suddenly she found herself talking to Humphrey of these things. Her enthusiasm delighted him. It seemed to change her, to make her seem suddenly more alive. It took her mind from the dreadful contemplation of those sordid tasks of hers.

"Oh, I'm sure I've got two copies of Crashaw,"

Humphrey told her, "he's a tremendous favorite of mine. I'll send you one. And I've got lots of the moderns as well. You ought to know them if you care about poetry. There's Flecker—" He began to quote, scraps here and there from his own favorites. He was delighted to hit upon a subject that interested her. For he liked Ursula, he admired her unusual type, so dark, almost un-English, and he wanted her to forget her shyness and embarrassment when she was with him. He knew hundreds of girls of Daphne's type, they grew in every drawing-room, and although it was seldom one saw such perfect and accurate beauty as hers, he knew many that were far more brilliant and accomplished. She did not interest him; he guessed her to be selfish and ambitious. Ursula, on the other hand, interested him enormously. He saw that she looked tired and overdone, and good-naturedly he tried to cheer her, unaware of any danger to her. Unaware, too, that even now, in her eager gratitude, she was fashioning a saint's halo to adorn his fair head.

"Will you come back to-morrow?" he asked, as she made a movement as if to get up, preparatory to departure.

She reflected. "Monday? Oh, no, I shan't have a moment. Monday's almost the worst day of all."

"Tuesday?"

"I go into St. Faith's to do the shopping."

Tuesday had its own particular trials and anxieties, the bitter task of making one shilling go as far as three. And whatever his mood, she had to approach her father and obtain the necessary money from him. It pierced her heart sometimes to see the look upon his thin face when he gave it to her. She was the only one who saw in Mr. Finch an object meet for compassion. His difficulties were enormous, and his wife and Daphne thwarted him

at every turn by their careless, sinful extravagance.

"We may meet there, then. I haven't explored St. Faith's properly yet. And I can help you to carry all your parcels."

"Oh, but you must not trouble," she said.

"Mustn't I?" said Humphrey.

He watched her as she walked swiftly along the path that rimmed the cliff like a narrow, twisting ribbon. He did not offer to walk home with her, for he shrewdly suspected that if their meetings were discovered they would be put a stop to. And he wanted to have a few more talks—about Crashaw and Francis Thompson for instance—with quiet little Ursula Finch.

CHAPTER V

DAPHNE'S visit to the Abbey had been so successful that she had very quickly recovered from her momentary disappointment and annoyance, caused by the absence of Humphrey Willmot. His mother explained that he was very fond of going for long, solitary walks, and when thus engaged, he often forgot all about the time. Probably he wouldn't be back till quite late. She spoke of her son in a way that suggested she found him quite perfect.

Daphne was far too wise to display any but the most conventional degree of disappointment. After tea, when Mr. Willmot had withdrawn to his study, Mrs. Willmot proposed that she should sing to her. She had brought her songs, of course. The piano wasn't a bad one, Humphrey said, he had played on it for some time yesterday evening after dinner. Thus encouraged Daphne sang song after song. She had a really beautiful voice and she looked very pretty when she was singing. She liked her music less as an art than as a means to an end. Her talent gave her significance. Afterward when she came back to the sofa where Mrs. Willmot was sitting, that lady touched her hand and said kindly:

"You must stay with us in London. We shall be going there in June for a month or six weeks. And then if you ever care to sing for a charity, I know the Duchess of Flint would let you sing at her house. She never has any one but the most talented amateurs; she is the patroness *par excellence* of young singers, especially girls."

Daphne's blue eyes shone with joy. She seemed to see doors opening into delicious luxurious places.

"Oh, would she really ask me, do you think?" she said, and her fair face was all suffused and glowing with a very genuine emotion. "That's just the kind of thing I've always dreamed of. But I am twenty-four, and I have never sung anywhere except at a penny-reading in the school here."

"We must change all that," said Mrs. Willmot kindly. She loved to act as fairy godmother to beautiful young girls. "I hope to fix a date for you to come to me very soon. But I shall write to the duchess about it first. She's a great friend of Humphrey's, by the way; he stays with them in Scotland nearly every year."

This remark seemed to reveal to Daphne something of Humphrey's social importance. He could give her everything—everything. He would take her away from Pentarn. She was almost glad now that he had not been present this afternoon; had he been there she could not have had this thrilling talk with his mother.

"It would be very kind of you," she said. "I have never spent a season in London, though I have always longed to do so."

Her enthusiasm delighted Mrs. Willmot, who foresaw for Daphne a very real success. It was strange that Humphrey should have deliberately absented himself just when she was expected. He was such an admirer of beauty. She was sure that she had told him Daphne was to come to tea and had promised to bring some songs. She kept hoping and hoping that he would return, at least in time to walk home with her.

Daphne left, however, before he returned, for Humphrey remained on the cliff for a considerable time after Ursula's departure. He felt that he did not wish to encounter Daphne just then, with Ursula's innocent revelations still so fresh in his

mind. This poor little girl slaved so that Daphne might appear like a brilliant and beautiful butterfly, daintily and delicately dressed. She was out to conquer, and conquer she assuredly would, sooner or later, with her very striking loveliness, that charm and grace of hers. But he preferred this little, brave, valiant Cinderella who had not even time to pity herself as so many young girls would have done, condemned as she was to what he considered an almost degrading slavery. One thing, however, he assured himself she should no longer lack. She should have all the books, all the poetry, she wanted. When the rare moments of leisure came her mind should not want for sustenance. He would send them to her to-morrow. He had quantities that he never looked at, besides he could always buy them again.

Daphne arrived at the rectory in excellent spirits. She was too late for the evening service, and as she came up the path she could hear the strains of *Abide with Me* issuing from the church. When the fancy took her she would lead the choir and even attend the practices, but there had been a fuss with her father over this because he had discovered a flirtation between her and a young artist from St. Faith's who had come over to sing, and Daphne had withdrawn in order, as she expressed it, to "pay him out."

Every one else was at church except Mrs. Finch, who was resting on the drawing-room sofa; but Daphne required no other audience than her mother, to whom she eagerly poured out the events of the afternoon.

"But, of course, I shall have to have lots of new clothes," she added.

"I am sure I do not know where they are to come from then," said Mrs. Finch fretfully; "your last

winter's furs are not paid for, and I have not even dared show the bill to your father."

"Well, I simply must have clothes or it will be no use my going," said Daphne imperturbably. "I've never had such a chance before. Of all the rich young men I have ever seen this Willmot is far the best-looking and the most agreeable. Generally, if they have any money they are short or fat or ugly."

"It will be a fearful expense," said Mrs. Finch with a sigh. "I don't see how I am to get the money. We owe so much as it is."

"It will all be paid some day," said Daphne cheerfully; "this visit will be a kind of investment. I am to sing at the Duchess of Flint's. Mrs. Willmot did not say much, but I am sure she liked my singing."

"She seems disposed to be very kind to you," said Mrs. Finch; "but if you do go, Daphne, although I don't see how it can possibly be managed, you must remember it's the last chance I can give you. You must promise me not to waste your time flirting with silly, impecunious young men. You must learn to concentrate—"

"On Humphrey Willmot?" asked Daphne, with a brilliant smile.

To win his mother over to her side seemed to her half the battle. She had always found mothers more difficult to deal with than their sons.

"If not upon him upon someone equally eligible. We can not go on for another year unless you make a good marriage."

"I will promise anything you like if you will only contrive to get me some clothes," said Daphne. "Ursula will have heaps of time to overhaul my things and run me up a few blouses between now and then."

"It was very odd of this young Willmot going out this afternoon just when you were expected. It does

not look as if he were so very much taken with you."

"He has only seen me two or three times," replied Daphne with undiminished complacency. She was always perfectly frank with her mother, and they had few secrets from each other. "It will be different when I stay there. He is not at all the sort of man to be bowled over at first sight. He must be perfectly aware of his own value, and probably he is sick of being run after and so is on his guard."

"I have always wanted you to have a season in London," said Mrs. Finch, who believed her daughter's attractions to be matchless. "Of course, it is very hard on you to spend your life down here. It is not even as if it were a good neighborhood with several large houses and plenty going on." She looked at Daphne fondly.

"By the way," said Daphne suddenly, "what has come over Ursula?"

"Come over Ursula? Why, what do you mean?"

"She's looked so queer this last day or two. Excited—and happy—as if she'd heard good news."

"I haven't noticed anything," replied Mrs. Finch.

"If it hadn't been steady-going, old Ursula, one would have said that she had suddenly fallen in love," said the astute Daphne.

"I hope Ursula has no time for such nonsense," said Mrs. Finch severely.

"She might. People do, you know," said Daphne. "I'm going to keep my eye on her."

"You need not be afraid. I am sure Ursula has no time to think of such things," repeated Mrs. Finch. She did not know why, but Daphne's words filled her with misgiving.

"If there *is* anything I shall find it out," said Daphne. "She will have to be very busy these next few weeks. She has been a perfect age over that last blouse, and it isn't done yet."

Daphne honestly believed that Ursula preferred to cook and sew and iron, so admirably and with such energetic industry did she perform these household tasks. She never stopped to notice her sister's tired and harassed look, especially when some extra dressmaking had fallen to her lot. There was no minor tragedy to Daphne in the monotonous whirr of the sewing-machine in Ursula's tiny work-room—a sound that frequently continued long after everyone else had gone to bed. It was Ursula's life, and Daphne did not stop to ask herself whether she enjoyed it or not.

Monday, as Ursula had informed Humphrey, was almost the worst day of the whole week. It seemed as if it insisted upon her paying in long hours of extra exertion for the brief respite afforded by Sunday. She was busy on the following day preparing the luncheon with such inexperienced assistance as Jenny could offer, when her mother's voice called her. She ran down the flagged passage into the hall and saw Mrs. Finch standing there with a parcel in her hand. Her face wore an unusually stern and annoyed expression.

"A parcel for you, Ursula," she said; "one of the servants from the Abbey has just left it. Open it at once. I am sure there has been some mistake and that it is intended for Daphne."

Ursula was hot and flushed from the effects of the fire. She looked at her mother almost in terror. A parcel for her? For the moment she had forgotten Humphrey's promise to send her Crashaw's poems, nor had she dreamed of his sending her books in this way. She fumbled nervously with the string. The knots were obdurate. Something in her mother's manner made her feel as if she had done wrong.

"I can't think what it can be," she said.

Mrs. Finch watched her with hard eyes.

The knots were all undone now and Ursula removed the paper. Half a dozen slim books fell out. Mrs. Finch took up one of them and opened it.

"Poetry!" she said, suppressing a slight snort. "I'm glad you have time to fill your head with all this rubbish. I know I haven't. Who sent you these books, Ursula?"

But Ursula hardly heard her. She was reading a little note, enclosed in the parcel. It was—wonder of wonders!—from Humphrey himself.

"Dear Miss Finch, do please accept my Crashaw. He isn't new but you mustn't mind that. I take the liberty of sending you a few other duplicates in the hope that they may interest you. Yours sincerely, Humphrey Willmot."

Mrs. Finch held out her hand. Ursula put the note into it nervously. There was no escape, for she was still treated as a child, but she knew that it could never mean so much to her when other eyes had read it.

She began to make excuses. "There's no harm. A few books—I've wanted them so." She was terrified lest they should be taken away from her, perhaps sent back. This thought was too terrible, and instinctively she gathered them up, string, paper and all, and held them tightly.

"I hope you didn't ask him for them?" said Mrs. Finch.

"Oh, no, we were talking, and he found out I'd never read Crashaw, and he said I ought to know the moderns too."

Daphne's warning speech of yesterday came back very forcibly then to Mrs. Finch's mind.

"Pray when did you have this conversation with Mr. Willmot?" she inquired. She was very angry, and her anger was deepened by the fact that Hum-

phrey, who had absented himself from home when Daphne was expected to tea, had been, on the other hand, very much aware of Ursula. He had even written to her and sent her books—a quite unheard-of thing.

"We met—on the cliff," said Ursula desperately. A lump came into her throat. She was certain that now those meetings had been discovered they would be arbitrarily stopped. Perhaps she would never be allowed to see him again.

"Ursula," said Mrs. Finch, "I am extremely annoyed with you. And I am not going to allow you to waste your time talking to young men on the cliffs or reading a lot of foolish poetry. However, you will have very little opportunity for doing either these next few weeks. Daphne is going to stay with the Willmots in town next month, and you will have a great deal of sewing to do. She tells me you have dawdled over that last blouse of hers, and no wonder, if you have been wasting your time in this silly, undignified way."

"Oh, I promise I will only read the books in my spare time," said Ursula, thankful to discover that her newly-found treasures were not going to be immediately confiscated.

"At your age I never had any spare time," said Mrs. Finch, severely.

"It is true. I don't have very much. Especially when there is sewing to do for Daphne."

The letter was safely back in her keeping. She was about to move toward the stairs when Mrs. Finch called her back.

"Ursula, I must forbid you to meet this man on the cliffs. I did not believe that you were capable of such conduct. You are not to do it again. Why did you never mention it? Have you been meeting

him often?" Her stern eyes were fixed upon Ursula as if demanding the truth from her.

"I have met him twice. I did not say anything about it—it did not seem necessary. I am sure that it won't happen again."

To-morrow, perhaps, she would meet him in St. Faith's, and then she would explain to him that she could not come any more. Perhaps, it would not even be necessary to say so. He must already be bored with her ignorance. It was impossible he could wish to continue those talks. Yet, he had remembered to send her the books—so many more than she had ever expected—and he had written a kind, friendly little note, exactly like himself.

"I shall take good care that it does not happen again," said Mrs. Finch dryly.

Ursula went slowly upstairs, the tears gathering in her eyes. Mrs. Finch entered the dining-room, which served at the rectory as a general sitting room, and approached Daphne, who was curled up on the window seat, reading a novel. The window commanded a view of the shabby, unlovely approach to the front door. Daphne liked it on that account, and she knew, too, that her hair looked splendid against the faded rag of green curtain.

Mrs. Finch shut the door after her.

"Daphne, that young Willmot has sent Ursula some books," she said.

Daphne put down her novel and gazed at her mother, interested but quite unperturbed.

"Books? What sort of books?"

"Poetry," said Mrs. Finch briefly. "And a note. Short, of course, but quite friendly."

"I told you there was something up with Ursula. What a pity we didn't send her abroad with Mrs. Burton's sister with the unpronounceable name!" She returned to her novel.

"I can't spare her. I really don't know what's to be done." Mrs. Finch sat down and folded her hands. Annoyance from such a quarter seemed to her like an injury. Ursula had always been so amenable. A useful ghost that went hither and thither, performing tasks that everyone else refused to undertake, not a person who walked on the cliffs with young men and received books and notes. The offence would have been less if the young man in question had been other than Humphrey.

Mrs. Finch had a profound and not uncommon distrust of all poets and poetry. All that she knew of the lives of poets—with the notable exceptions of Tennyson and the Brownings—only served to confirm her opinion that they were unhappy, unreliable, generally immoral people, wholly unfit for respectable drawing-rooms. Most of them died young, which was perhaps a relief to their relations. She had a lesser but still very sharply defined distrust of those people who professed to like reading poetry. She had hoped that Ursula had "got over all that silly nonsense long ago." As a child she had been fond of reading and copying verses and learning them by heart, sometimes to the detriment of her other studies. And now here was Mr. Willmot sending her these books—delicately-bound, modern books, printed on hand-made paper. It was so unlike anyone to send books to Ursula.

She was impatient at Daphne's calm indifference.

"Of course, it's your own fault, Daphne. You told me that you were walking about St. Faith's with young Carter that day you met him. And I dare say he has heard gossip." There was acerbity in her tone.

"Perhaps he has," said Daphne calmly; "but one can't help these things."

Her placidity often restored Mrs. Finch to good-

humor. She was not naturally an ill-tempered woman, but poverty, a large family, an irritable husband had reduced her to an almost chronic condition of "crossness."

"Daphne, do put down that novel. You really mustn't allow Ursula to step in like this and ruin your chances. He is certainly never likely to marry her, but a man who admires Ursula will never think seriously of you."

"I know that," said Daphne, "but I really can't begin to be jealous of Ursula. I've told you the only plan is to get rid of her, and you won't hear of that. How in the world has she been able to see him?"

"They met on the cliff," said Mrs. Finch briefly. "I have told her it is not to happen again. I can't possibly send her away, we are quite enough at sixes and sevens as it is. It would be a thousand times worse without her. I am not strong enough to help in the kitchen and look after Jenny. And your father—you know what he is like if things get too —too muddled!"

"I know only too well what he is like," said Daphne, satirically; "and so does everyone in Pentarn. Aubrey Carter refuses to put a foot inside the place because he was so rude to him about me."

"Dear Daphne, I wish you wouldn't discuss your father with these young men!"

"What else is there to talk about? Papa is such a fruitful topic, you can't deny that," said Daphne, with calm, almost unconscious disrespect. "We can not possibly hide our family skeleton, can we?"

"Ursula looked quite confused when I made her open the parcel in front of me," said Mrs. Finch, reverting to her grievance.

"Poor Ursula—she hadn't the courage to refuse,"

said Daphne. "You would never have got me to do it."

"Ursula is different. And she is younger. She was always sentimental. I dare say she is letting herself fall in love with him."

"She must learn to keep to her rôle of Cinderella until I am married," said Daphne; "after that she can do exactly as she likes as far as I'm concerned. Do not think, however, that if I marry a rich man I shall divide my dress-allowance among you all like the heroine of a novel. I shall want every penny I can get for myself. I do not at all see why I should give it to Ursula or Nicholas!"

Mrs. Finch knew from experience that there was no exaggeration in this speech. Daphne was utterly selfish, had reduced that quality to such a fine art that she had almost contrived to invest it with a certain attraction. Daphne married would be Daphne utterly lost to Pentarn. But her departure would reduce household expenditure by nearly half. Their income could then perhaps be made to cover the strict necessaries of life. There was always the fear that Nicholas might run into debt, but so far nothing of the kind had occurred.

Luncheon was brought into the room by Jenny, who flung the dishes on the table with such vigor that they ran an imminent risk of not remaining there. A bell sounded, and Mr. Finch appeared. Ursula and Ruth followed, and took their seats at the table in silence. Daphne gave her sister a piercing scrutinizing glance which made her color guiltily to the roots of her hair.

Mr. Finch was a short, swart man, thin, angry-looking, with a harassed air that compelled pity.

"What is this about the Burtons and Ursula?" he burst forth angrily. "Burton has written to me this morning about parish matters, and he adds at

the end that he is so sorry Ursula didn't see her way to accepting his sister-in-law's offer to return to Rome with her. What do you mean by refusing any offer without first consulting me? If Burton had said this instead of writing it, what sort of a fool do you think I should have looked? I, who had never heard of it!"

"It was only last week," said Mrs. Finch nervously, "and we came to the conclusion that we couldn't spare Ursula. She has her home duties."

"It was not a very delectable post," said Daphne, who could always interpose a calm and temperate explanation. "Madame Garroni is Mrs. Burton's sister and she has two brats, half-Italian and half-English. She is trying to find a nursery-governess for them. Mrs. Burton thought, of course, we were all as anxious to get rid of Ursula as you seem to be!"

Her cool, ironical tone always exasperated her father.

"Hold your tongue, miss! If I have any more of your impertinence you shall leave the room! Ursula, I am the best judge as to what you ought to do. One mouth less to feed will make a considerable difference to our weekly bills. You would be off my hands—you would be earning money—"

"And in the meantime we should all be slowly poisoned by Jenny," observed Daphne. "It would cost you more to keep a cook than to have Ursula here."

"I do not intend to keep a cook. If help is wanted you shall give it yourself. You do nothing from morning till night except fool about with young men. Ursula, what made you turn up your nose at Mrs. Burton's offer? I look for some sense from you!"

"Mamma refused for me. I didn't know anything about it till afterward," said Ursula.

"I should pity you if you had to look after the Garroni children, if they are half as vulgar as their mother," observed Daphne, "but since papa is so keen about it I am sure it is not too late. There can be no competition for such a post as that! Madame Garroni offers the dazzling salary of twenty-five pounds a year, and you will have the sole charge of her two children, day and night. I would not do it myself for a fortune!"

"You had better not talk like that. Soon I shan't be able to keep any of you idling here at home. Especially you, Daphne, you cost more than all the others put together." He eyed her in disgust. "That is a new blouse you have on. You know I've forbidden any of you to buy new clothes this summer!" His eyes snapped with anger.

"Ursula made it from some silk I had. It hardly cost anything."

"So you *had* the silk, eh? How long had you had it? I suppose you bought it the last time you went in to Penzance!"

"I don't know how long I've had it. It's such a bore remembering silly, unnecessary things like that!"

"Well, I shall write to Burton at once and tell him I was never consulted. This Madame Garroni had better come over and see Ursula. If they can fix it up, the sooner she goes the better!"

Ursula's heart sank. A fortnight ago—a week ago—she would have welcomed the prospect as an incredible liberation from all her present drudgery. But now—with Humphrey's kind, friendly note reposing in her little desk upstairs, waiting to be read and re-read, together with his wonderful gift books. Books to be read and loved and learned by heart. She suddenly felt that it would break her heart to leave Pentarn.

Daphne laughed carelessly.

"Ursula has a young man, so naturally she doesn't want to go," she observed, her blue eyes fixed upon her sister's face.

Ursula, sensitive and reserved, felt that her very heart had been bared to public view, to public ridicule.

"Ursula? A young man? What do you mean?" Mr. Finch turned angrily toward his second daughter. Nothing annoyed him so much as the thought of any of his children wishing to marry. He was always rude to Daphne's many admirers.

"It is only young Mr. Willmot; he has taken to sending her books of poetry," said Daphne, delighted at the storm she had raised. It would give Ursula a salutary lesson.

"Books of poetry? Impertinence! I hope you sent them back. I will not allow you to receive presents from young men! Where are these books?"

"They are upstairs," said Ursula, miserably. "I will send them back if you wish." She had become quite pale. Daphne was cruel, was torturing her—Daphne, who loved that kind of persiflage.

She was unable then to see Humphrey in his true proportion and perspective. She had not played with love for years as her sister had played with it, enjoying it as a beautiful, perilous pastime that some day might conceivably hurt her. She had thought of it, dreamed of it, with secret wonder and longing. Thus Humphrey's sudden coming had been to her like the rising of some splendid, unexpected star.

"I have seen them, they are only rubbish," said Mrs. Finch, "quite small, unimportant books. I suppose he wanted to get rid of them. In any case we can not quarrel with the Willmots—they are inclined to be so kind to Daphne, and I feel they will

be useful friends for her to have." She had not as yet mentioned Mrs. Willmot's invitation to her husband, knowing that it would be unlikely to meet with his approval.

"I am accustomed to Daphne's being a subject of gossip for the whole village," said Mr. Finch, " but it is a new departure for Ursula. I imagined that I had at least one sensible daughter, but it seems that all women are hopelessly alike. This man is in a very different position from you, Ursula, and sooner than that your name should be coupled with his I should prefer you to earn you own livelihood by going to Rome with these Garroni people."

"If Ursula goes to Rome she will become a Roman Catholic!" said Daphne, with a light laugh.

"If she does she will never see the inside of this house again, and so I warn her," said Mr. Finch. "Your remarks are in their usual bad taste, Daphne. I would rather see my daughter dead than a Catholic. But I know Ursula would be on her guard against their blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits."

"Madame Garroni is not a Catholic," said Mrs. Finch. "Her husband is not at all religious and he lets her bring up the children as she likes. There is sometimes a fuss with his old mother about it, Mrs. Burton tells me."

Daphne felt triumphant; she felt that her point was won. There was no doubt that Ursula would go to Rome and probably go very soon. What would it matter if the food were so badly cooked as to be uneatable? There would be no more of these secret meetings with Humphrey on the cliff. And she herself would soon be far away from Pentarn, enjoying herself in London, and teaching Humphrey to forget Ursula.

CHAPTER VI

"I SHALL write to Mrs. Burton to say we should like to reconsider the matter," said Mrs. Finch that afternoon, when she was alone with her daughters. Tea had just been brought in and Ursula was engaged in pouring it out. "I am afraid we were selfish in thinking of our own comfort instead of the great advantages you would reap, Ursula, by going abroad. I am sure if anyone had given me the chance of going to Italy at your age I should have jumped at it."

Daphne shot a quick glance at her sister. Ursula was so reserved that it was probable they would never learn whether she suspected the real reason for this abrupt change of front. If Mrs. Finch had been really determined to keep her at home she could very easily have persuaded her husband that far from being an economy the project would entail heavy expenses, since it was impossible that Jenny could do all the work of the house without competent assistance. But Ursula made no response to her mother's speech, and in her tacit acquiescent attitude one could only feel that she had relinquished her fate into their hands without striking a blow to avert it. For years she had accepted everything "lying down," she had uttered no complaint, she had performed the tasks they had given her to the best of her ability, and now she was perfectly ready to leave home at their bidding. And in a sense she would have a measure of freedom, of independence; at the worst she would only exchange one form of servitude for another. No one could ask of her that she should sit up night after night sewing and stitch-

ing when her heavy day-time tasks were accomplished.

"I shall send Ruth over with a letter in the morning asking them to come to tea," continued Mrs. Finch.

Ursula looked up quickly.

"But to-morrow I must go into the town to do the shopping. I am often back late," she said.

Were they going to cheat her of to-morrow?

"Oh, very well, then I will suggest Wednesday," said the unsuspecting Mrs. Finch.

After tea Ursula went up stairs. She must finish Daphne's blouse. She took her work and sat down near the open window of the tiny attic that was set apart as a sewing-room. Presently she heard a footstep on the stairs and Mrs. Finch came into the room. She rarely penetrated to those regions, and Ursula wondered with a faint misgiving why she had come now.

"If we really settle for you to go, Ursula, the sooner your plans are made the better."

"Yes, mamma," said Ursula.

"You will be glad now that you have had the charge of Ruth. It has given you a practical knowledge and experience of children, especially of little girls. Madame Garroni's children are both girls, and you will find it quite easy to look after them and give them their first lessons."

"Yes, mamma," said Ursula, again.

"The change to Rome will be very good for you. I have often thought lately that you looked tired, depressed. Perhaps, you have had too much to do, but I don't approve of girls being idle." She paused, surveying her daughter. Did she guess anything? "We—we are thinking of your good. That is really our sole motive for sending you. At first, as you know, I felt I simply couldn't spare you."

"What made you change your mind, mamma?" asked Ursula, lifting her grey eyes to her mother's face.

"I felt that it was selfish to let you forego—such a very real advantage." There was a slight hesitation in Mrs. Finch's voice, for she resented the question. Had Ursula really any suspicions?

"Supposing I'm not happy there—that I don't suit them—I shall not be able to leave. I could not afford to pay the journey home, it is a very long one."

"You must just make up your mind to be good and useful, and then there will be no difficulties of that sort," said Mrs. Finch, in a tone that was meant to be bright and bracing but which carried no conviction to her daughter's ears. "Try to be very obliging to Madame Garroni. I hope you will be a great credit to us. I have always thought you could earn your own living."

Ursula went on sewing. Her deft fingers fitted the pieces together with a swift and practiced precision. Her mother watched her closely.

"Of course, the life will be different. The Garronis live in a flat—they call it an apartment. I am sure it must be delightful!"

Ursula made no answer. She had a sudden, intense desire to fling herself at her mother's feet, and implore her not to send her thus away into exile. She couldn't, couldn't go. She would do twice as much, work twice as hard, if they would only let her stay in Pentarn. Hadn't they often said that she saved them a second servant or at any rate from the necessity of getting a very experienced one? How would they get on with only a rough girl like Jenny? She remembered with dismay Humphrey's horror at the proposal when she had mentioned it to him. He had reminded her that she knew nothing

of what life was like in such a *milieu* as the Garronis'. But a glance at her mother's face checked these mad, fantastic impulses. They would perhaps think, after what Daphne had so cruelly said, that she wished to stay at Pentarn on Humphrey's account. Any hardship would be preferable to that. She was thankful when her mother turned away and went toward the door. As she left the room she flung this parting injunction at Ursula.

"I want you to make a good impression upon Madame Garroni when she comes here to tea on Wednesday. Try to be as bright as possible. I don't want you to look as if we were forcing you against your will. You quite understand, don't you, Ursula?"

"Yes, mamma," said Ursula.

When Mrs. Finch said, "You quite understand, don't you?" she meant that she intended to be obeyed. When Ursula was a little girl and had failed to understand after being thus warned, it meant the prelude to punishment. She had always been punished more frequently and severely by her mother than any of the others, because Mrs. Finch had never comprehended Ursula's silent acquiescence and had attributed it to sullenness. "I simply can't stand a sullen child," she used to say by way of excuse. She could not see that the silence was the result of an unconquerable nervous fear from which Ursula had always suffered. It was so different from Daphne's calm audacity and desire to have her own way at any cost, or from Nicholas' wilful rebellion accompanied by outbursts of terrific anger.

Still the words kindled a new hope in her heart. Perhaps, with all her efforts she would be unable to make that good impression upon Madame Garroni which should result in her being engaged as a nursery-governess. Perhaps, when she emerged to be

inspected the verdict would be against her. Madame Garroni would, no doubt, expect to see a bright girl of twenty-two, tall, fair and strong. One of those clever, capable, athletic English girls who are never fatigued nor depressed, nor sick nor sorry. Not a pale, thin, tired-looking person like herself. And she wasn't really experienced, she knew nothing of children and their little ailments, except the small knowledge she had gleaned from looking after Ruth. They would surely want someone much more experienced than that.

She would see Humphrey to-morrow. Already her simple plans were made. She would start for St. Faith's as soon after luncheon as possible and get her shopping done early. If Humphrey were in the little town she would certainly meet him, and if not, she would have time to go up to the top of the Island and look at the wonderful view over the Atlantic. Perhaps there would be no opportunity for her to do this again before she left Pentarn. It would be beautiful there if this fine weather lasted. A blue sky and bluer sea, and the coast-line painted in purple and gold and green, enclosing lovely little bays. But more than that she wanted achingly to see Humphrey, to tell him of the plans that were being made for her, to listen perhaps to words of encouragement from his lips. No man had ever affected her like this before. The men who ordinarily visited the rectory took but scant notice of her. They came to see Daphne, to hear Daphne sing, to talk and laugh with Daphne. But Humphrey had never from the first seemed so profoundly aware of Daphne. He had singled out Ursula, and had talked to her, always with a kindliness and humor that set her at her ease, and made her almost forget temporarily the tasks that were waiting for her. She would think to herself with a sort of re-

assurance: "I ought to be finishing Daphne's blouse; she's quite right to say I've dawdled over it. It'll take me three hours if I work hard, and I ought to have worked at it for an hour after lunch to-morrow. There won't be any time in the morning, but I can sit up at night. I can do it before I go to bed if I don't go to bed till two." Some plan of this kind was always necessary if the day's occupations were too numerous, and when, as on this occasion, Ursula was going to snatch a delicious surreptitious hour of secret happiness, it salved her conscience to think she could pay for it by a few hours of real mortification. It would balance things, and no one would ever know.

She tried to persuade herself that this threatened thing could never really happen; they wouldn't send her away from home with these almost unknown people. She had tried so hard to do her best, to accomplish all the tasks that had been allotted to her. If she had failed sometimes to come up to the high standard they exacted it was because time or strength had been lacking. Why did they try to impress upon her now that they were seeking only her own good? They laid such stress upon the advantages that would accrue to her. It was the first time they had ever spoken of sending her away to earn her own living. And at first she hadn't hated the idea. It was just now—when she was so happy—that it had come upon her like a disastrous thunder-clap. And she ought to be grateful. She would have been grateful if it hadn't been for that little, teasing, worrying conviction that they had some perfectly different reason from any they had adduced for banishing her. It couldn't be, of course, on account of the books and note that Humphrey had sent her. She had been quickly made to feel that she was in disgrace when she had opened the parcel

and disclosed its incriminating contents. She had been sharply reproved for meeting him. They were in the right there of course, for she had wilfully wasted her time according to their ideas. But surely it wasn't for that they were going to punish her so heavily?

Suddenly the door opened and Ruth came into the room. She flung her arms round Ursula's neck and burst into tears.

"Oh, Ursie, darling, they won't do it, will they? Send you away, I mean? I shall die if you go away." Sobs choked her utterance.

Ursula put down the piece of white silk she was sewing, and took Ruth quietly in her arms.

"You must be very brave, Ruth," she said in her gentle voice, "or you will make a coward of me, too. If they do send me it will be because they think it will be good for me. We are very poor, and perhaps papa and mamma think it's time for me to do some paid work. And some day I shall come back." She touched Ruth's rust-colored locks with her hand.

"But Daphne—she's allowed to spend and spend and she never does a thing to help anyone. She only sneers at us. Oh, Ursie, why do you go? Why don't you tell them that you won't? Rome's such a long way off and you may be gone for years." She clung convulsively to her sister.

"Ruth, dear, you mustn't cry like this, you'll only make yourself ill."

"And I've got to take the letter asking these horrid people to come! I shall want to tear it up on the way and throw the pieces into the sea."

"That wouldn't do any good. You'd only make things worse for both of us."

"It would be a protest," said Ruth, lifting her

head. "I simply can't bear to see you submit so meekly, without a word!"

"Dear Ruth, I should be sent just the same whether I rebelled or not. It's always best to go quietly without a fuss."

It was more easy to be philosophic to Ruth than when she was meditating in solitude on the hardness of her destiny.

"It's Daphne's doing, of course. Have you done anything to offend her, Ursie? I knew all the time she was saying nasty sarcastic things about the Garronis that she was only egging papa on. She *wants* you to go, Ursie!"

"Yes, I think she does, but it doesn't matter. Papa and mamma both wish it, too. You're in the minority, Ruth." She smiled at her sister. "Let's be very brave over this, darling. We won't show them we're hurt, will we?"

It was in this way that she calmed her sister, and the little, brave effort helped her, too. She must show a bright front for Ruth's sake. Some of her high courage seemed to come back to her. She returned to her sewing with undiminished diligence.

CHAPTER VII

TUESDAY dawned beautifully bright, one of those delicious days of May when the wind blew from the south, and shook the bursting, red buds on the fuchsias as if entreating them to open and disclose the purple tassels concealed within. Already the deep violet blossoms were starring the sturdy hedges of veronica, that paid so little heed to the roughest of Atlantic gales. Tall fox-gloves were beginning to show their crimson spires, and a mist of veiling emerald hung over the Cornish woods. The young bracken was springing up, and here and there, deep in those very woods, were spread scented carpets of bluebells, like patches of sapphire almost mirroring the sky. The "sweet o' the year" had come, and was filling the wild spaces with rich scents and wonderful growths, and heaping the Cornish orchards with the fairy snow of fruit-blossom.

Ursula walked, as it seemed to her, on air, into St. Faith's that afternoon. She accomplished her shopping without delay, and left all her parcels at the grocer's until she should return to fetch them on her way home. It had gone to her heart to refuse Ruth, who had wished to accompany her, but not even for Ruth could she forego this meeting which might indeed prove to be her last, with Humphrey Willmot. She told herself that she would be certain to come across him, if he really remembered to walk into St. Faith's to-day.

She passed quickly through the narrow, crooked, picturesque alleys of the fishermen's quarter. These sturdy, little stone houses were well sheltered by the Island from the brunt of the winter storms. They nestled in the very cup of the town with hills

rising on three sides of them, while on the fourth the harbor pool, almost empty this afternoon of water, lay between them and the sea. The little mackerel boats, with their tawny sails, were lying high and dry as Ursula passed, and flocks of greedy, predatory sea-gulls waddled on the sands or on the very decks of the boats in search of food. They made patches of brilliant white in the sunshine.

Ursula emerged at last from the streets and followed one of the steep paths that led to the summit of the Island. The green turf was broken by great boulders of rock, and she was careful to avoid treading on the fishermen's great nets that were lying there outspread to dry. There was no one about, it was really too early, and Ursula enjoyed the rare freedom, the sense of solitary enjoyment. When she reached the top of the hill she entered the little stone chapel, dedicated to St. Nicholas, and built on the site of a very early one, whose ruins had been demolished.

Someone was standing within the building, his back turned to her. He was looking out of the window that commanded a splendid view of the Atlantic, so blue and buoyant to-day under that wonderful May sky.

He turned abruptly.

"Is it really you, Miss Finch? I was wondering how long you would be over that very extensive shopping of yours!"

He held out his hand, nor did he notice how hers trembled as it lay for that brief second in his.

"It is all done," said Ursula, "and so I thought I would come up here—I knew it would be beautiful to-day." She sat down on a seat. The steep walk, combined with this sudden vision of Humphrey, had made her a little breathless.

Humphrey Willmot went back to his old position

by the window. He saw the long, blue line of the Atlantic, and below him the waves were surging and boiling against the black fangs of the rocks, and throwing up delicious fountains of silver spray. Flocks of white clouds were sailing across the sky like immense pilgrim birds. In the distance he could see the great rock, honored with the title of island, upon which stood Pentarn lighthouse.

"Since I came here I have been studying Catholic remains in Cornwall," said Humphrey suddenly. "All these little-known Cornish saints. Why, the country was full of them—nearly every place has been called after Saint Something or Other! I'm trying to find out about them, what they did and why and how they died. They're only remembered in the names of villages, and I suppose sometimes, but not always, on the altars of the Catholic Church."

"But you are not a Catholic?" she said, with a vague remembrance of all that Mr. Finch had said about the Roman Catholic Church on divers occasions from Pentarn pulpit.

"No—I sometimes think I'm not anything at all. Do not be offended, but I am utterly out of sympathy now with anything the Church of England can offer me. I go sometimes, of course, to please my people. But I am much more at home in St. Peter's."

He went to the door.

"There's a seat—let's sit outside," he said.

Ursula rose obediently and joined him.

"In Cornwall there are some of the earliest remains of British Christianity. I'm one of those who wish most sincerely that the old Faith had never been cast out. It tore away an integral part of England. It deprived her of part of her soul. She'll recover it, I'm convinced, she's too great not to do

so, she's too good to lose it forever, but at what cost will she buy it back?"

Ursula had never heard him speak so seriously before. She felt fascinated by the touch of warm emotion in his voice, the obvious sincerity of his words.

Mr. Finch belonged to the evangelical school of English churchmen, and Rome and all that it stood for was to him anathema. He had far more in common with those numerous ministers of varying forms of dissent, that were to be found in almost every Cornish parish, than with the High Church views supported by his brother-clergy at St. Faith's. Ursula had thus never heard anyone speak of the Catholic Church with any reverence or admiration before. But Humphrey influenced her powerfully, and his words impressed her with a force she could not understand. She longed to agree with him—if she only dared—and to hear more, and yet she had the feeling that she was doing something very wrong in listening, and permitting herself to be swayed by words that were so opposed to all the standards that obtained at Pentarn.

"I'm afraid I can't expect you to agree with me, Miss Finch. You must have been brought up in other traditions."

"Yes," she assented. "I know very little about any other religion, except what my father teaches." Then with an effort she added, "You are the first person who has ever praised the Catholic religion in my hearing. And one hears it so often abused."

"We have forgotten even the stories of those saints who lived and died in Cornwall. St. Ia was martyred, it is supposed, at Hayle, but we know very little of her except the fact of her miraculous voyage from Ireland. Other countries don't forget their saints like that! They remember them—they

are proud of them—they pray to them! All that has been swept away here by the Reformation, and it means loss, not gain to the country that has forgotten them. Why, do you remember St. Francis' companions wouldn't let him die in Perugia, they took him back to Assisi for fear their beloved city should be deprived of his relics after his death? I like that—it appeals to me more than this deadly indifference!"

Ursula was silent. She was consciously yielding herself to his influence.

"If I could only do something to rescue those splendid British saints from oblivion! It's the difference it would make to us I'm thinking of. Even our forgetfulness can't diminish their glory; they are wearing their haloes to-day in the Kingdom of God!"

A cloud had for a moment darkened the sky and below them the bay of St. Faith's had become slate-colored. In the silence that followed Humphrey's passionate speech they could hear the steady, rhythmic breaking of the waves on the rocks below. Ursula never knew quite what it was that inspired her to say to him then:

"Perhaps you will become a Catholic. These forgotten saints may pray for you."

"It would be very difficult for me to do it even if I wished to. You see I am an only son, and it would naturally meet with a good deal of opposition."

"Oh, I was just envying you for being a man, for being able to do just as you liked!" she said. The words seemed to slip from her unawares. Was there really something Humphrey couldn't do if he chose?

She liked the sense of intimacy the conversation was giving her, the feeling that he was actually tak-

ing her into his confidence concerning spiritual things.

But now his face clouded, and he said a trifle brusquely:

"I question if any of us are so favorably placed as to be able to do that, Miss Finch."

The words had the speedy effect of sending Ursula back into her shell. Had she been guilty of an impertinence that deserved to be summarily checked by words that sounded, in contrast to his preceding ones, almost rough? A snubbing word could always overwhelm her, and produce that timid, awkward silence which in her childhood had met with swift, sharp rebuke. Suddenly, she became the repressed child again. Humphrey, utterly unused to such nervous, morbid sensitiveness, did not in the least realize what he had done. His mind was in deep contemplation of his own position, and his thoughts were, at that moment, utterly removed from Ursula. Not that he was really thinking of becoming a Catholic, for he was not. But whenever he let his mind toy with the idea he became aware that compunction for his parents and their woeful disappointment, should this thing happen, arrested him sharply from pursuing the train of thought to its logical conclusion. He was continually stopping short of it, because the problem held no solution that was not beset with difficulties. He wondered why he had spoken of it now to Ursula, and had actually admitted to her, with something of bitterness, that even he, with such apparent liberty and independence, could not always choose the path that his own inclination might indicate. He was a singularly devoted son, but his position, like that of most only children, was by no means always easy. On the whole he had seldom disappointed his parents, maintaining toward them that

invariable attitude of affection, tinged with a kindly humor which they found so attractive in him. He had learned to conceal opinions and inclinations that were in direct opposition to their own, aware that they still regarded him, as they had always done, in the light of a brilliant, wayward child who must be governed by the lightest, most prudent of hands! And it was more than a little to his credit that he tactfully sustained the illusion, anxious to avoid hurting their feelings and susceptibilities by a too violent demonstration of manly independence.

If the chain pressed at all he could always go away on his eternal travels.

The sea was a wonderful color now, grey, chrysoprase, jade, with shining glimpses of silver where the sunlight touched it. Far off a ship could be seen riding with a graceful swiftness, leaving a trail of purple smoke across the sky.

"I have never thanked you for the books!" Ursula said suddenly. It had been an effort for her to speak and break the silence that had so enfolded them. "I didn't write—I thought I should see you. It was very, very good of you to send so many. I can't tell you how lovely I think them."

"I'm very glad indeed that you found something in them to like," he said, smiling at her enthusiasm.

"A great many things!" she assured him eagerly. "Of course, I don't have much time for reading except at night, or at a few odd moments in the daytime when I'm waiting for something to boil."

"You mustn't spoil your pretty eyes by burning the midnight oil too freely," said Humphrey.

No one had ever told Ursula that she had pretty eyes. They were certainly very pretty now as they looked up through black veiling lashes into Humphrey's with a shy gratitude that touched him.

"May I really keep the books?" she said, ignoring his speech.

"Of course they are for you, if you care to have them. I'm afraid they are not worth much, but they are all I had down here."

"That is very kind of you. Because later on I think I may have more time to read them. You see I am going away. It isn't quite settled, but very nearly."

"Going away, my dear Miss Finch? Why, I thought you told me that you never went away!"

"Only twice in my life—I hardly remember it. But this time it will be for ever so long."

She had wanted to tell him, to show him something too of the desolation that she felt at the prospect. Now his dismayed surprise astonished her.

"For ever so long?" he repeated, looking at her with an incredulous almost angry astonishment. "I believe you are kidding me," he went on, dropping into schoolboy slang. "Where are you going to? You are not going to be married, are you?"

"Oh, no," said Ursula, laughing at the bare idea of anything so inherently impossible. "I am going to Rome after all to be Madame Garroni's nursery-governess if she still wants me. She hasn't seen me yet, and perhaps she won't like the look of me when she does."

"A nursery-governess?" he repeated. "You cannot be serious? I thought your mother had refused?" His dismayed eyes rested upon her with a sharp scrutiny. "They have no right to force you, if you don't want to go. And you simply *cannot* want to go!"

He had never been able to understand what sort of financial position the Finch family enjoyed. There was Daphne, for instance, charming and dainty, almost expensive in her attire; there were Mr. and Mrs. Finch, shabby and harassed-looking as if worried by continual efforts to keep the wolf from the door; there was Ruth, of whom he had

caught occasional glimpses, clad in skimpy cotton frocks and rough shoes such as the village children wore. And lastly there was Ursula, occupied almost ceaselessly with hard strenuous household tasks, her odd moments of leisure admittedly secured only when she was waiting for something to boil!

But, of course, they were badly off. He ought to have known it. And Daphne, the beauty, was probably absorbing everything in order to win a prize in the marriage-market. Well, his mother would doubtless succeed in achieving that destiny of her if anyone could! He almost hoped that it would be accomplished speedily, so as to release the younger sister from servitude. Several of his mother's protégées had made quite excellent marriages!

"I told you the other day that mamma had refused it for me," said Ursula, "but now she has changed her mind—she thinks it would be to my advantage to go."

Such authority as held her in its strict discipline was an unknown quantity to Humphrey; it seemed to belong to those past ages of tyranny when parents were parents, and children, children—till they married or died. But Pentarn was so utterly out of the world that he felt modern notions could never exist there, they must certainly perish of anæmia in that blear, antiquated atmosphere! He began to realize her life, to wonder why, even now, it hadn't begun to sour that soft sweetness of hers. She accepted everything so simply. Creatures of habit, these women! Mr. and Mrs. Finch must possess quite mediæval notions regarding the position of daughters in the household. Ursula was little better than a servant if report spoke true, and all that she had told him of her life certainly confirmed it. Did she

regard with any envy the ease and pleasure that her sister had managed to secure? When he looked at Daphne he was wont almost to forget Ursula as a creature of sombre, inconspicuous plumage. But when he looked at Ursula, as he was looking now, he felt an odd resentment against Daphne that almost amounted in its intensity to active dislike.

He rose a little abruptly.

"I suppose we ought to go, it's getting late. Hope I haven't bored you to death with my hagiographical ambitions, Miss Finch!"

"I am never bored," said Ursula with truth.

They descended the hill, and at the grocer's shop he bade her a rather abrupt farewell. Why had he gone so suddenly? Had she bored him? For the last five minutes they had sat there in silence, but she had not found it tedious. She had had the feeling that her mind was in some subtle communion with his.

CHAPTER VIII

"You are very late indeed, Ursula," said Mrs. Finch. "I suppose you forgot that your father was going out to this meeting, and had to have his supper early. What on earth made you dawdle so long in St. Faith's? And you started so early too, much earlier than usual."

Any slight deviation from her normal habits was always quickly perceived. She had started early, had returned late. And she had no explanation to give. Ursula flushed uncomfortably under her mother's words and sharp glance of questioning scrutiny.

"Oh, I am very sorry. I quite forgot about papa. I walked both ways to-day, and I did go to the top of the Island to look at the view. I thought I might not see it again."

"You are really too foolishly sentimental," said Mrs. Finch querulously, "as if the Island would run away! It will be there still, I suppose, when you return from Rome. And I had to get your father's supper myself, just because you were mooning away your time on the Island!"

"I am very sorry," repeated Ursula. She spoke in a distressed tone. But she was willing to pay. Such happiness, coloring her drab life with rainbow radiance, was too great not to be paid for, perhaps heavily.

"I do not know what Madame Garroni will think of you. I am afraid she will not keep anyone so forgetful and incompetent for a single week!"

"I know—it was very wrong of me to stay out so late," said Ursula. She seemed to invite people

to trample upon her. Mrs. Finch was somewhat appeased by this determined humility. Ursula always seemed a little afraid of her, and this attitude flattered her.

"You will have to work very hard, between now and the time you go, to get Daphne ready for London," she observed; "so the less you gad about the better. She really has hardly a rag to her back, and naturally she wants to have everything as nice as possible when she goes to stay with such rich people as the Willmots."

"Yes, of course she does," assented Ursula. It hardly occurred to her to ask herself why Daphne should be exempt from any kind of work, even from work of which the sole aim was the decoration of her own person.

"And you must think of your own things too," said Mrs. Finch. "Of course, you won't want anything new. Nursery-governesses are not required to be smart, but you must be perfectly neat. I assure you, you have a very full fortnight before you, Ursula, and there must be really no more rushing off to the Island."

"Oh, of course, I shall not go there again," said Ursula.

"You can't afford to be lazy or think of your own pleasure just now, when Daphne's whole future depends upon her looking as nice as possible. These Willmots are very rich important people. Of course your father throws cold water upon the whole thing—he says Mr. Humphrey Willmot is never likely to look at Daphne because he can certainly marry wherever he likes. But they will be in the same house—they will see each other day after day. It is a chance the darling has never had before!"

It was the first time she had spoken candidly to

Ursula on the subject. Doubtless she had her own reasons for doing so now.

Ursula's heart sank a little as she listened. She thought of her long conversation with Humphrey that day. Her mother could have no suspicion as to the real causes that had detained her so long in St. Faith's that afternoon. She felt guilty, for she had never before had the courage to conceal anything from her mother. Yet, what was there to tell? Just that she had seen him—oh, so unexpectedly as he stood there, his back turned to her, gazing out of the little window of the chapel; that they had sat together on the low wooden seat outside, their feet resting on the short turf that was starred with the pale, fragile pink of the little bindweed; that she had talked to him for a rapturous hour, with the brilliant blue of the Atlantic lying outspread before them like a magic sea? Why should she mention such trivial, tremendous, exquisite things? Why not hide them in her own heart, where they most surely belonged?

His voice was still in her ears. His gay, ironical, almost whimsical face seemed to be gazing down into hers with a kindly, tolerant interest, becoming at times even a little indignant. His eyes were grey-blue with a hint of green, just like the Atlantic on a stormy day. Not the bright blue of Cornish eyes that looked like patches of turquoise in the bronzed faces of the fisher-people, but eyes that changed quickly from dark to light, from grey to blue, from grave to gay. It gave her a little pang to remember how suddenly he had risen and said that it was time to go. Even his leave-taking this evening had been abrupt, almost unceremonious. For the first time they had made no plan for seeing each other again.

"Day-dreaming, Ursula?" said Daphne's light, disdainful voice.

Ursula had been too absorbed in her thoughts to observe her sister's entrance. She started, blushing painfully.

"You must be in love. Do tell me his name!" Daphne was slightly acid now beneath her very sweetness. Had she guessed anything? Did she know anything? Ursula both looked and felt guilty.

"I am not in love," she said in a constrained tone. "I have no time for that sort of thing."

"One can always make time for anything one wants to do," said Daphne. "Besides you are getting sly. You never told us about your meetings with Mr. Willmot."

Ursula's heart sank at the mention of his name. She felt a sudden sensation of cold, followed by one of burning heat.

Mrs. Finch interposed.

"Daphne is quite right. I won't have you behaving deceitfully, Ursula! Do you understand me?"

"You need not interfere, mamma," said Daphne. "Ursula will very soon bore him to death. Just seeing her will act as a kind of homeopathic remedy for that sort of foolishness. She has no idea how to be agreeable or amusing!"

Yes, it was quite true. Hadn't he gone off this evening with scant ceremony, putting an abrupt end to the interview he had himself sought, scarcely pausing to say good-by?

"But, of course, you have been seeing him to-day. You must have had a perfectly heavenly time, judging by your intense expression when I came in just now." Daphne's voice was coolly provoking. She liked to see her victim writhe, the contortions amused her. And she wanted very badly to punish Ursula.

"We met by accident. He was on the Island.

He wanted me to sit down and talk to him." The words seemed dragged from her. She had a vague notion that it would be wicked to deceive them, although when they knew the truth they would be certain to find some means of hurting her. She felt raw in Daphne's hands, as if she were being ruthlessly dissected by a practiced scalpel. Oh, she hoped that Humphrey would never have the misfortune to marry Daphne!

She looked at her sister, and for the first time in her life she found herself envying her beauty, that wonderful arresting fairness of hers, the thick wavy hair so blonde as to be almost lint-colored, the delicate bloom of her skin, the blue Cornish eyes, the black lashes that they had all inherited from their Cornish grandmother, and which contrasted so sharply with the rest of Daphne's face. She envied her too her fearless assurance, the slim grace of her figure, her accurate incisive voice with its peculiarly charming intonation—perhaps a singer's intonation. Physically and outwardly she was perfect. Ursula sincerely believed in her own ugliness. Few women, indeed, could have stood the strain of daily comparison with Daphne.

"Were you trying just for once to cut me out?" continued Daphne, who was determined now that Ursula should not be spared. "But I don't think, whatever your intentions were, that we must let you go wandering off to the Island. Jenny can surely do the weekly shopping if it's necessary, and the Island seems to be a very dangerous place. I shouldn't really like you to burn your fingers, Ursula. You've always been such a steady-going old thing!"

She gave a low rippling laugh. She had absolute confidence in her own powers to win Humphrey, to win him, too, coldly and deliberately. Not that she

loved him, or that she intended to allow herself to fall in love with him. In her heart she cared far more for the charming, impecunious artist, Aubrey Carter. There was something exciting in *that* adventure! He was so desperately, so grovelingly in love with her; more so than anyone had ever been. It was all nonsense, of course; he hadn't a sou. Daphne liked to play a skillful, dangerous game. Still, it was annoying, when she came to think of it, that Humphrey had actually invited Ursula to stay and talk to him. But perhaps she had only imagined it; had taken some simple, conventional phrase of politeness for an invitation to remain.

She went out of the room. Ursula sat there in speechless suppressed misery, not unmixed with feelings of anger and revolt. She had wanted, all the time that Daphne was speaking, to cry out, to stop her. She had felt the words falling upon her like little sharp whips.

Mrs. Finch came across the room to where Ursula was sitting.

"Daphne is quite right," she said in a hard tone. "I won't have you going to the Island. Do you hear me, Ursula?"

"Yes, mamma," said Ursula, wearily.

She was conscious of an intense lassitude that attacked body and mind and spirit, sapping all her energies. The process of payment was a hard, fatiguing one, and this time it had had to be accomplished without any delay.

"To-morrow there will be no necessity for you to go beyond the garden. You have not forgotten that Madame Garroni is to come to tea? I have asked her to bring her children so that you may have the opportunity of making their acquaintance. I am sorry that you have made it necessary for me to keep an eye on your goings-out and comings-in,

Ursula. I must forbid you to go beyond the garden again without asking my leave. Do you understand?

"Yes, mamma," said Ursula.

"Do you intend to obey me? If not I shall get your father to speak to you!"

"Of course, I mean to obey you."

"It is disgraceful at your age that you should require to be looked after in this way," said Mrs. Finch.

She went out of the room. What did young Mr. Willmot mean by showing Ursula so much foolish attention? Of course, it was turning her head. But a little strict discipline would soon bring her to her senses. Ursula had always required a firm hand. The curb and a reminder that the whip was there in readiness—that had been her constant method when Ursula was a child. The result was that she had never, until now, given them an instant's real anxiety. But she must not be allowed to begin just now when Daphne's whole future seemed to lie in the hands of young Mr. Willmot.

Madame Garroni accepted the invitation to tea at Pentarn rectory with a feeling of profound relief. She had been bitterly disappointed when Mrs. Finch had, on that former occasion, so firmly refused her offer on behalf of Ursula, for she had made up her mind from Mrs. Burton's description of her that the girl was the very person for whom she was so fruitlessly searching. She had not in the meantime discovered anyone who was at all suitable. People refused to go so far from home for such a paltry salary. They asked tiresome questions, too, about hours and duties and holidays, as if suspecting that Madame Garroni's situation was less desirable than she so enthusiastically described it. Most of the applicants wished to devote themselves to an only

child, and to receive a far handsomer salary. But two little girls of eight and six—such difficult, tiresome ages. And only twenty-five pounds a year. Mrs. Finch had made no objection to anything of the kind; she had simply refused on the grounds that Ursula couldn't be spared. What a mercy she had come to her senses, as her letter seemed to indicate. There was even evidence of fear lest she should have changed her mind too late to secure the post for her daughter!

Madame Garroni was on this occasion not accompanied by her sister, but she brought her two little girls with her. Alda, the elder, was a slim, dark-eyed creature, rather frail-looking. Rosina betrayed more evidence of her English blood, was sturdier, with golden hair and a bright, chubby little face. Ursula was attracted by the elder child, who sat on a chair near her mother, and behaved with all the dignity and composure of a grown-up person. Although she took no part in it, she listened attentively to the conversation, and seemed completely free from the restlessness, the perpetual questioning, that characterize the normal English child. Rosina, on the contrary, was all over the room, touching the photographs that stood on the tables, and paying no heed to her mother when she forbade her to do so. But they were both attractive, engaging little things, and Ursula began to feel more hopeful about the task that lay in front of her.

Madame Garroni was all the time taking stock of Miss Finch. She was quick to recognize in her a quality that had lain outside her own conception of the person she intended to engage. It was that look of quiet and innate refinement which stamped her at once as a lady, even as a lady of birth and distinction. She was as unlike the usual run of nursery-governesses who accept situations abroad as she

could well be. Her low, charming voice, her serious air, her graceful movements made an immediate impression upon Madame Garroni. She even had a moment's fear that Ursula was altogether too "superior," possessing qualities that she herself lacked —qualities that were born, not made.

"Of course, I shall be charmed if you will come," she said to Ursula. "If you have never been abroad you will find a great deal to interest you. I am not fond of sight-seeing myself, and I always catch cold in those great cold churches; but I know I am an exception. Many people like Rome immensely. I can't say that I do, but when one is married one can not pick and choose. I infinitely prefer London, and the shops are better there. Still, there are certain things we do get cheaper abroad. I think perhaps one always dislikes the place where one is obliged to live." She rattled on in a good-natured, slightly inconsequent manner, but all the time Ursula felt that she was being sharply, attentively scrutinized.

"Your mother tells me you have never been away from home in any capacity before. I am a little sorry that you have had no previous experience, but I am sure I shall easily be able to train you. You will find my children very sweet, but they are quite Italian, and you must never attempt to treat them as if they were English. I have tried sometimes with Alda, but it did not succeed, and then their father makes a fuss. He does not like them to be punished or to be forbidden to do things, unless, of course, it is something actually dangerous."

"They are not Roman Catholics, are they?" asked Ursula, suddenly. Afterward she did not quite know why she had yielded to the impulse that prompted her to ask this question. It is possible that she was influenced by what Humphrey had said yesterday.

Mrs. Finch glanced sharply at her daughter. What an odd question for her to ask! What on earth made her think of it? She thought she had told her it was not the case.

"Oh, dear no; they come to church with me. My mother-in-law made a fuss at first, because I had to promise before I married that they should be Roman Catholics. But I soon discovered that Guido—my husband—did not care in the least what they were, and I wished to show the bigoted old lady that she had no right to interfere. I believe though that she tries to teach them some prayers behind my back. It does not matter—they are too young to be influenced."

"After all, they are half English. I do not see why they should be brought up in all the Roman errors," remarked Mrs. Finch, complacently.

"You would have, of course, entire charge," continued Madame Garroni, turning again to Ursula. "You will sleep in their room—we are rather short of bedrooms owing to our having my husband's nephew, Mario, living with us, as well as my old mother-in-law. I'm afraid there is no nursery, but you will be out of doors so much that you will not really feel the need of it! I live near the Borghese Gardens, and in summer you will spend nearly all day there. My one fear is that you may find the life with us too idle, after being busy with all kinds of work in your father's parish!"

"Oh, Ursula has never had much time for the parish," interposed Mrs. Finch; "just the Sunday-school and a little visiting when necessary. Hitherto she has had charge of Ruth, my youngest girl; she has had to teach her. And then there is always sewing to be done and other things around the house. We are unfortunately only able to afford one servant. I have trained Ursula to be useful." Her lips closed in a thin, firm line.

"I am very glad of that, it is the most sensible training one can give one's girls. I feel sure you will be an immense help to me, and I shall enjoy having someone English to talk to; you will be quite a companion. And, by the way, my plans are a little altered because Guido is getting impatient; he does not like me to be away so long, and he wants the children. That is the worst of having a husband—they are such impatient creatures! So I am afraid I shall have to start not later than to-day week. Can you be ready by then, do you think, Miss Finch?"

Before Ursula could speak Mrs. Finch had hastily replied:

"Of course, she will be ready. When there is a parting to be made I always think the sooner it is over the better!"

Ursula looked at her mother. Ready? If left to herself she would never be ready to go and seek her fortune thus in the unknown. It was like offering her a bitter draught and asking her if she were ready to drink it. Her heart sank. She did not like Madame Garroni, and she felt that she was not a lady; that there was more than a touch of vulgarity in her speech and language and appearance. She was even less attractive than Mrs. Burton, whose wealth had enabled her to acquire a certain surface veneer of good manners. It would be odious to be her paid dependent; to be patronized and ordered about by her. The conditions, too, would be worse than she had anticipated. Day and night she would never be alone. There was something appalling in the prospect. And once there she would be utterly forgotten at Pentarn, except by Ruth. She would be one burthen the less, and Daphne would go to London, would see Humphrey every day. Of course he would end like everyone else by falling in love with

her. Ursula had never yet seen the man who was ultimately proof against Daphne's attractions.

"I hope you are really strong?" continued Madame Garroni, who felt that now she had secured her prize she must proceed, if not to find actual fault with it, at least to suggest certain shortcomings that she was graciously willing to overlook. "It would be really no use your coming if you are at all delicate. Just now it struck me that you were looking rather pale."

"Oh, Ursula is never ill," said Mrs. Finch hastily. "I do not remember that she has ever had a real illness. Just measles and chicken-pox when she was a child—the things all healthy children have, and I always say the younger they are when they have them the better! We have brought up our children on simple, hardy, sensible lines. No coddling or fires in their bedrooms in winter. You need not be at all afraid of Ursula's health. If she has plenty to do she will never have time to think about it, that's the best remedy."

"I suppose you don't know a word of Italian?" was the next question.

"No, but I dare say I shall soon pick it up."

"It isn't so easy. I have never mastered it perfectly, although I have lived there nearly nine years. Of course, I know enough to speak to the servants. You will be required to speak English to the children of course. They are very lazy about it, and always jabber Italian when they are together."

"Yes," assented Ursula.

"Do you know any French?"

"A little. I can read it quite well."

"Dear me, I thought everyone knew French in these days. Music—drawing?"

"I can give first lessons in both," said Ursula

simply. "I did not know you required anything more."

"No, I must not be too exigent. And while the children are so young they don't require a really accomplished, highly-educated governess. Alda is very quick and clever—the Latin mentality, Miss Finch. Our slow-going British brains find it a little trying to cope with at first! Rosina is much more English, she is like me, we always think. She is my favorite for that reason. Then next Wednesday, Miss Finch. I think we may regard that as quite settled. I was already in correspondence with some really very talented girls who were most anxious to come, but, as my sister says, it is far better to take someone you know something about. I feel certain we shall get on admirably together." She rose and looked down patronizingly upon Ursula Finch. "I am sure I need not ask you if you are fond of children?"

"I am very fond of Ruth. She is almost the only child I have ever known," answered Ursula.

Later on Madame Garroni observed sapiently to her sister:

"I can't help thinking the girl is clever, although she is so quiet and seems to have no accomplishments, as we understood the term in Penzance. I hope she will not prove too much for me, but I think between us all we shall be able to keep her in her place!"

CHAPTER IX

WHEN Madame Garroni had gone with her two little girls, Mrs. Finch went quietly up to her daughter and gave her one of her rare embraces, as if she were a little sorry for what she had done.

"Ursula, you do feel that it's for your good? You don't feel as if we were sending you away?"

Whatever Mrs. Finch did she always required that people should think well of her, and believe that she had been actuated solely by high, altruistic motives. She was very anxious that Ursula should not connect her departure with the presence in Pentarn of Humphrey Willmot. She wished her to believe that they were really making a sacrifice in thus permitting her to leave home, because it would be such an enormous advantage for her to go to Rome as Madame Garroni's nursery-governess.

"Oh, no, I am sure it will be good for me to see the world," said Ursula. She returned the embrace, which had touched her the more because she was so utterly unused to any demonstration of affection from her mother.

"Then you don't dislike the idea?"

"Perhaps I do rather. You see it's all been so sudden. And I'm sure Madame Garroni won't find me nearly so useful as she expects. I feel afraid."

"Afraid! What are you afraid of, Ursula?"

"Of going so far—with these strange people. We may not suit each other."

"At your age I should have welcomed such an agreeable change," said Mrs. Finch, in a manner that was intended to be bracing. "I wish you would train yourself to look at the bright side of things. You are so different from Daphne!"

Ursula was silent. She was thinking to herself: "Next Wednesday. How shall I bear it? Oh, if I could only see him once more before I go—just once, without Daphne or any of them there!"

She looked so pale and distressed that Mrs. Finch was moved to say kindly:

"You'd better run down to the cliffs for half an hour. It's a delicious evening. Don't go far—not farther than the coast-guard station. And don't stay out more than an half an hour. I shall let you off sewing for Daphne when you have finished her blouse; you will only have time now to attend to your own things."

"Thank you, mamma," said Ursula.

Daphne had gone to the Abbey this afternoon, so one could safely suppose that Humphrey was also there, Mrs. Finch reflected. It would be quite prudent to give Ursula this little run. It would cheer her. She was evidently distressed at the thought of leaving home so soon. But that would soon pass, and she would settle down quickly enough to her new life and duties.

Ursula put on an ancient straw hat with a faded green ribbon tied round it, and went out of doors. She did not particularly wish to go, but the permission had been in the nature of a little concession, and it would have been absurd not to avail herself of it. She passed through the garden, with its clumps of fuchsia and hydrangea, its sturdy thick-set hedges of veronica. She could hear the sea, the hiss of it, the thud of breaking waves. The soft air was brackish to the taste, it went to her head like wine. She had spent all day indoors, and the fresh air excited her. She felt almost passionately alive. Just for this half hour she would forget Rome and the Garroni family, and enjoy the unexpected freedom as a starving man enjoys food. It made her

long ardently for solitude and liberty, not in strictly homeopathic doses, which were all that were allotted to her now, but in large, generous draughts of satisfying sweetness. They were the two things that were necessary for development, both spiritual and physical, Ursula now assured herself. When she had left the garden behind her she hurried toward the cliffs. She wanted to spend as much time as possible within sight of the waves.

It was nearing the hour of sunset. Already the blue of the sky was fading to green—that green that mingles with the blue in a turquoise. Across the flooding golden light there were dim purple streaks, painted horizontally with a curious precision. The sea was very calm and of a wonderful color, neither blue nor green nor grey, but touched with silver in the fading light. She was watching it so intently that she never heard the sound of approaching footsteps, moving softly on the short, springy turf, with its rosy patches of sea-pinks.

"I am really in luck this evening, Miss Finch," said Humphrey's voice.

Ursula felt now that she had always known she should meet him. His light, ironical voice made the words sound less significant than they were.

She uttered the first thing that came into her head.

"It is all settled, and I am to go on Wednesday," she said, and her voice broke in an ill-suppressed sob. "I ought not to say anything when they all tell me it is for my good!"

"Really? On Wednesday?" said Humphrey. He was a little astonished at her manifestation of emotion, for she had always seemed to him so passive and acquiescent, and up till now he had observed no hint of mutiny in her quiet demeanor. Still the worm will always turn at last.

In a moment she had recovered her equilibrium; he admired her rapid return to self-control.

"Do tell me about it! You know Rome very well, of course. Tell me, please, that I am sure to like it. It's the thought of going so far with these people, who are almost strangers to me, that upsets me a little."

"Well, it's very lovely," he said. "I've spent several winters there and one whole summer, which I think I enjoyed most of all. The glorious radiant heat of it! But whether you'll like it under these particular circumstances I can hardly venture to prophesy."

"That is what I'm so afraid of! I dread strangers, and I didn't care for Madame Garroni. I felt that she would treat me almost as a servant."

It was delicious to have a sympathetic confidant to whom she could reveal these intimate reflections. At home they would have been regarded as "grumbling," and severely censured.

"Then, dear Miss Finch, why do you go? If, as you say, they're doing it for your good why don't you tell them frankly that you'd rather not?"

Ursula was silent. Long ago she had guessed the true reason for her hurried departure. But this was something which naturally could not be confided to Humphrey.

"You see, I shall be earning, and I shan't cost them anything. I shall be off their hands. And we're awfully poor."

Humphrey was silent. They were sitting side by side on the dry, short grass of the cliff. A patch of early poppies glimmered redly in the falling dusk. An elder bush in full bloom made an almost ghostly effect with its broad white blossoms. Over the sea the twilight was drawing dim blue veils. Below them they could hear the beating of the waves on

Pentarn Rock, where the white lighthouse stood up like a slender pillar.

At that moment he felt Ursula's attraction very strongly. He knew that she was suffering, suffering in the dumb way of inarticulate creatures, and he realized how great had been her need of sympathy when she had confided her fears to him. She was beautiful, too, in an unusual way; he had not thought her so at first, but now he wondered how he could ever have been blind to the fact. He had a moment's wild impulse to tell her that he loved her, that he could not let her go. But his thirty years had taught him wisdom of a hard, practical kind. He had seen her perhaps less than half a dozen times; he didn't really know her at all. He would have to know a woman a great deal better than that before he asked her to marry him. It would be ridiculous to yield to such a fantastic impulse as that. He liked her very much; he liked talking to her, looking at her, was even at times heartily sorry for her. He had sent her those books because he pitied her, and felt that she had a rather unpleasant time. But beyond that he had never intended to go. It had been a trifle unwise, seeing that she was so unlike other girls, to ask her to come and meet him more than once; he saw now that because of this she was beginning to talk to him as an intimate friend, of whose sympathy she was assured. Already he counted for something—even if only for a very little—in that dull, starved life of hers. He was a little in love with her, but then he had often been a little in love with women; it scarcely trespassed with him beyond the comparatively safe bounds of *l'amitié amoureuse*. He believed in the transient nature of this emotion; it differed in no way from what he had felt several times before. But he was annoyed that just the one person he liked talking to in Pen-

tarn should be going away and leaving the place for an indefinite time.

"I don't believe you'll like it a little bit," he declared wrathfully. "Who are these Garronis? I do not know anyone of that name. Are you sure they will treat you well? If your people are really determined you should go I feel that something much better might have been found for you!"

"We do know them a little," said Ursula, "and their being relations of the Burtons will perhaps make it impossible for them to be really unkind to me. I am only afraid of not being able to bear it, the being always with the children, day and night. I have to be with them all day, to sleep with them. She never said a word about my ever being free for an hour, or having a holiday."

"Then why did you not ask her?"

"I was afraid; you see, mamma is so anxious I should go. I did not want to make difficulties, to run the risk of displeasing Madame Garroni."

So she had not lifted a finger to avert a fate she detested.

"What is she like?" he asked.

"She is—rather vulgar," Ursula admitted.

"If you go abroad in such a capacity you ought at least to try to get a post in some well-known Roman family where you would be treated with every consideration. Only I fancy they prefer to employ Catholics to look after their children. You'll find the way of life so utterly different from anything you've ever known before." He stopped. After all, wasn't he judging by his own standards? What way of life was she accustomed to, in that small, shabby, out-at-elbows rectory? Wouldn't almost anything be preferable? And yet, no. Here, at least, she was securely sheltered. There she would be eating the bread of dependence. She

couldn't be happy. With her fine mind, her delicate perceptions, she might conceivably be very miserable indeed.

"Must you really go?" he said.

"Oh, I couldn't possibly back out of it now."

"Not even if you told them what you've told me?"

She shook her head. "Papa and mamma both wish it, you see."

Humphrey frowned.

"To me it seems so appalling that they should make you do it!"

"They don't really know—I've never told them—how I hate the idea. The strange thing is that I'm sure Daphne wants me to go. I never thought she would be in favor of it. I do so many little things for her."

So Miss Daphne's thumbs had been turned down, too. Was there an intrigue at the back of it all? He put the thought quickly from him. There could be only one reason—that of poverty. But it was unfair to sacrifice one child upon the altar of another. The problem of Daphne was one that baffled him. She had gone up to the Abbey this afternoon, and from his window he had seen her arrive in the daintiest of grey muslin frocks. No stint there.

"We must meet once more before you go," he said. "Here, perhaps, who knows? Do you think you will be free one afternoon?"

"I shall be very busy," said Ursula. "I don't think there is much chance. But perhaps on Sunday." She paused, looking at him with her grey, serious eyes.

"Ah, yes, Sunday. I remember you are absolved from cooking on Sunday. Well, I shall be here waiting for you to come."

Ursula rose. "I mustn't stay. I've been out too long as it is. Mamma told me not to be more than half an hour."

He opened his lips as if he were going to speak. But prudence prevailed. In repose his face was stern, and there were little lines under his eyes.

"Good-by," said Ursula, "you have been very kind. If I seem at all ungrateful or unthankful, please don't think I am really so. It is because no one has ever been quite so kind to me before, and I don't know quite what to say, except thank you for the books—for everything."

He was touched by the naive, simple, almost child-like confession.

"I'm sure you'll find plenty of people to be kind to you as you go through life, Miss Finch. I only wish it was in my power to do more. But in any case there is no need to thank me."

He wished he could save her from that unpromising fate. He knew enough of middle-class Anglo-Italian households to feel certain that she would not be happy in such a *milieu*. He had never seen Madame Garroni, but he had had sufficient glimpses of the Burton family to enable him to form a pretty good estimate of her and of her probable position in Rome. He had the feeling now—more deeply than he cared to confess even to himself—that he was wronging both Ursula and himself by his silence. Every moment she seemed in a sense dearer to him. That last speech of hers, in which she had tried to put into words something of the gratitude she felt, had pierced him sharply. He tried to shake himself free from all scruples concerning her, but it was not easy to do so. He had been to blame, of course. He had made her come, not once but many times; he had dared to evoke that gratitude when all the time it was he who should have been grateful. He

had given nothing; he had satisfied only his humor of the hour. He turned away so as not to meet her grave, dark eyes that were looking up into his.

What beautiful eyes they were—the most beautiful surely in all the world! And he was letting her go deliberately.

He took the hand that she held out to him.

"Good-by," he said, "until Sunday."

He stood and watched her as she walked quickly across the grass toward the group of storm-bent trees that sheltered Pentarn rectory. She did not once turn her head, but he never guessed that it was because her eyes were swimming with tears.

She met no one, fortunately, and she went quickly up to the little airless attic that constituted her work room. On the table near the window stood the sewing-machine. She took Daphne's blouse, all wrapped in silver paper, from a drawer, and began at once to work. Yes, she ought not to have stayed out so long. She had been sitting on the cliff for more than an hour. And there was more to be done to the blouse than she had imagined. It would take a long time to finish it. The night hours seemed to stretch out endlessly in front of her. In anticipation she could already feel that dreadful but familiar sensation of hot and heavy weariness that only the night-watcher or the night-worker can know. The dull hot pain behind the eyes; the nervous, trembling hands. The aching longing just to lie down and sleep—and then hard on the top of that first slumber—morning. Time to get up, to creep downstairs, for fear of awakening anyone. And then a new day filled to the brim. Never again perhaps such strange, almost delirious happiness as she had known to-day.

Daphne opened the door and looked in.

"Oh, you're there, Ursula. Have you nearly done?"

"Not quite."

"Well, I absolutely must wear it to-morrow. I'm asked to lunch at the Abbey. And Humphrey is always in to lunch though never to tea, it seems. I'm to sing to him."

"You shall really have it to-morrow, Daphne. I'm sorry to have been so slow."

"Well, don't sit up all night!" said Daphne, good-naturedly.

CHAPTER X

DURING the few days that followed, Ursula was busy preparing her own things for the journey, and her household tasks were somewhat diminished. Her mother undertook them with the help of Jenny and Ruth. While she was sewing Ursula often propped the little volume of Crashaw up in front of her and read a few verses. There was a poem about St. Theresa that she found very thrilling, indeed; it did not take her long to learn a good deal of it by heart. And there were other poems of quite singular beauty. Words such as these seemed to possess her mind, wonderful, beautiful, awe-inspiring words:

> Lord, when the sense of Thy sweet grace
> Sends up my soul to seek Thy Face,
> Thy blessed Eyes breed such desire,
> I die in Love's delicious fire.
> O Love, I am Thy sacrifice!
> Be still triumphant, blessed Eyes!
> Still shine on me, fair suns! that I
> Still may behold, though still I die.
> For while Thou sweetly slayest me
> Dead to myself I live in Thee. . . .

It made of religion quite a different thing from that which was offered to her at Pentarn. It wasn't only long hymns, interminable hymns, shrieked out by small boys out of tune. It wasn't only sermons. There was something else, something that uplifted and almost opened the doors of heaven to you. She wanted to find out what it was. Perhaps Humphrey, who knew so much, could tell her.

She didn't feel quite like herself during those last days at Pentarn. The weather was exquisite—so calm and still; and day after day the sea lay like a beautiful lake under a cloudless sky. She did not

go out much—there was really no time—and whatever happened she must be quite ready by Wednesday. She had received a letter from Madame Garroni, formally engaging her, and she felt that nothing but death could now avert her fate. But she was not wholly unhappy. There were hours indeed when she felt immensely happy, almost reasonlessly so. She did not associate this emotion with Humphrey; she only knew that her thoughts were all colored with a wonderful rainbow light. And on Sunday she would see him again, no matter what the cost. They would have one more last talk on the cliffs. Surely, he would say something to give her courage. The thought of Sunday upheld her through all the days that followed.

At tea-time on Sunday she said to her mother:

"May I go out for half an hour, please, mamma? I have not been beyond the garden since last Wednesday."

"Yes, you may go. But you must not be late for the evening service." Mrs. Finch eyed her daughter sharply. "Do not go far, Ursula; and remember to come back in good time."

Ursula was in a state of suppressed excitement. The thought of the long journey, now so imminent, the prospect of this final interview with Humphrey Willmot, were the two principal causes of her excitement. She felt as if she were on the brink of some perilous adventure which she was facing with a mixture of boldness and timidity. She was a new person even to herself, terribly alive and sentient. Yet, when she saw Humphrey standing there on the cliff all her boldness vanished, and left her suddenly tongue-tied.

"We'll go down to the sands to-day," he said; "the tide's out. We are never sure of being free from interruption here."

He led the way down the steep, rocky, winding path that dipped precipitously to the beach. It is possible that if he had said, "We'll go to the end of the world," she would have acquiesced with just that simple readiness she displayed now. The coming separation, now so near, so inevitable, had taught her one thing, and she could no longer disguise it from her own heart. She loved him. There was something of passionate devotion in her love. She would have died for him so gladly. That was where she was different from Daphne. Daphne would never die for anyone; she would, on the contrary, expect people to be quite ready to die for her.

Now they were on the hard, pale sands, ribbed with a delicate regular pattern that looked almost like a mosaic. They were shadowed by the overhanging cliff. From above no one could see them. They faced the Atlantic in all its splendor, and near by stood the black Island rock, upon which stood Pentarn lighthouse. It was a divine evening in May. The soft, warm air touched their faces like a caress. The sea was very calm, with tiny waves tumbling over each other in Liliputian frolic. A blue and silver sea, under a blue and silver sky.

"I wanted to tell you how much I like Crashaw," she said, breaking the silence. "He's so different from other poets. He makes religion seem so different."

Religion at Pentarn was rather a joyless thing relegated to Sundays. Ursula had often wondered if there were something lacking in herself that made it seem joyless and unattractive. It was an effort to sit very still through the long services, the equally long sermons. Mr. Finch had not the gift of preaching, and was hampered by a slight hesitation in his speech which gave him an imperfect utterance. As a child Ursula had dreaded Sunday unspeakably.

She had so often been punished on that day for not knowing her collect.

But Crashaw gave her a glimpse of something else, something wonderful, that made religion seem a sublime and beautiful thing. Something you would be willing to die for, as the early Christians had died.

"I dare say he makes it seem different to you," said Humphrey. "He was a Roman Catholic, you know—a convert to the Faith."

"Oh, was he?" said Ursula.

She knew so little about it that she had not detected the fact. Humphrey was indeed the first person who had ever spoken of the Catholic Church with warm admiration in her hearing. Mr. Finch's views were decidedly "low." He believed that religious truth had been summed up once and forever in the Thirty-nine Articles. All his children had been made to learn them by heart.

"Didn't you find that he made religion very attractive?" said Humphrey. He paused a moment, and then added, "dangerously attractive."

"Yes, but I didn't quite know why."

"Francis Thompson follows him very closely at times. Some people think him the greater artist of the two. At any rate he has written what many hold to be the finest English poem since Shakespeare —the *Hound of Heaven.*"

"Yes, I have read that; we have it at the rectory," said Ursula.

"Both men were Catholics," said Humphrey.

Ursula felt at once attracted and repelled. She had an uncomfortable remembrance of the word *error* as used by her father. It was always visualized in her mind as large and black, each letter surmounted by a little tip of flame.

"You'll see a good deal of the Catholic religion in Rome," said Humphrey. "I wonder what you'll

think of it, what sort of impression it will make upon you."

"Madame Garroni is a Protestant, so perhaps I shall not come in contact with it very much," said Ursula.

Again he had that old scruple about letting her go. He had been thinking of it a great deal, and he had made up his mind that she would not be happy. She wasn't one to settle down just anywhere. And the worst of it was that however insupportable she found it she would never give in or cry out, or tell anyone that she was suffering. She would just endure. And to-day as she sat near him, looking quite beautiful, he wasn't sure that he didn't want her to stay in Pentarn for his own sake.

"We shall hear news of you I hope through Miss Daphne," he said.

"Yes, I shall write to her."

"My mother has taken an enormous fancy to her. She does to people, you know, especially to girls. But this is the most violent I can remember. Depend upon it she'll arrange a marriage for her." He chuckled. "She likes doing that, and it's a harmless pastime enough. But I won't let her use her gifts on my behalf."

"Daphne is very beautiful. Lots of people have been in love with her," said Ursula, simply.

"I can well believe it," he answered; "but if I had the shaping of her destiny I should have her voice trained. It's wonderful that she hasn't spent everything she spends on her frocks and hats upon getting her voice properly trained. She has a real gift, and I should like to make her do three years of hard, strenuous work and teach her what it means. As it is I can hardly listen to her singing, because I'm thinking all the time of what she might have done!"

It was the first time that Ursula had ever heard

Daphne's voice criticized, and it gave her a faint sense of disloyalty, because she felt actual pleasure in hearing Humphrey say those severe words. He was a little inclined to be hard on Daphne. Ursula believed that any kind of hard work would kill Daphne, because she hated it so.

They were sitting on some low rocks right under the cliff that formed a kind of solid roof above them. The sea receded rapidly, leaving little shining pools that caught a wonderful colorless brightness from the sky.

"You must give me Madame Garroni's address in Rome," he said suddenly, "and then if I come across any books that I think you would like I'll send them along. Sometimes when one is abroad for any length of time one wants desperately something English—something from England—to cheer one up."

"It would be very kind of you, but you mustn't really trouble," said Ursula.

"It would be a pleasure, if you'll let me," he said.

He did permit himself to gaze squarely into her grey eyes as he said the words. Yes, they were beautiful eyes, dark, tender and frank. She was delicious in her prettiness, her shabbiness. Accustomed to women who were *soignée* and dainty beneath the ceaseless and complicated ministrations of experienced French maids, he realized the precise measure of failure to which Ursula attained in these respects. It was all the more wonderful that despite these disadvantages she could remain so beautiful, so attractive. One did not realize it perhaps until one was talking to her.

He felt almost dangerously sorry for her to-day. It was pity, he assured himself, that made him want to take her little roughened hand in his and tell her that he was sorry. But there were several excellent

and prudent reasons for keeping silence. He was an ambitious man and he enjoyed his freedom, his ability to go where and when the fancy took him. He had already a comfortable home—or rather a selection of comfortable homes—to which he could return. He was an adored only son; his homes were happy ones. Pentarn had proved a singularly happy one. It had brought him Ursula. He was nearly sure now that he loved her, but it would be necessary for him to put his love to the severe test of a prolonged parting in order to ascertain that it wasn't only that transient agreeable emotion he had so often experienced before, and from which he had always so quickly recovered! He told himself that when he married he must choose a woman of his own world, not a young girl from a tiny forgotten rectory, who would have to learn, so to speak, her very first steps. She was a lady and all that, but she was unworldly and utterly unaccustomed to life in its more brilliant urban or cosmopolitan phases. And it was inherently unlikely that, say, in six weeks' time he would still be in love with her. His pity, his weak liking, were merely ephemeral emotions. It certainly never occurred to him that Ursula could have anything but a friendly liking for himself. He could interest her, feed her hunger for books, and talk to her about them as he did to all his women-friends, of whom he had always had a great many. He had never imagined that any danger could accrue to Ursula from these meetings.

"I hope, you know, that it'll all be a tremendous success," was what he did at last manage to say; "at any rate you'll see Rome, and that alone is worth a certain sacrifice. I can remember the first time I ever saw it, as a boy with my people. It's rather overwhelming at first, in spite of its ugly modern quarter. Someone—I think it was Ampère—said

that the dome is *la seule des oeuvres d'homme qui ait quelque chose de la grandeur des oeuvres de Dieu.* Try to remember those words, Miss Finch. Don't let people prejudice you against Bernini, to whom so much of the interior decoration of St. Peter's is due. I want you to think of it as splendid beyond words. I am told one has to be a Catholic to appreciate the Baroque as it deserves. It's bound up, you know, with a particular period of church history—the counter-reformation. For the Church it was a period of life, of fresh impulse, of real and passionate spiritual energy."

Something in his ardor thrilled Ursula. He really cared—cared for that very kind of religion of which Crashaw and Francis Thompson had given her such divine glimpses. He made her want to know more—much more. She breathed a freer, larger air when she was with him than anything that the stifling, narrowing atmosphere of Pentarn rectory could offer. Was it true that the Reformation had swept all this incredible beauty out of England?

She quoted, almost under her breath:

> But reverent discipline, and religious fear,
> And soft obedience, find sweet biding here;
> Silence and sacred rest; peace and pure joys.
> The self-rememb'ring soul sweetly recovers
> Her kindred with the stars; not basely hovers
> Below; but meditates her immortal way
> Home to the original source of Light and intellectual day.

"Ah, you like that, too?" he said, looking delighted. "It's a very favorite poem of mine."

"Yes, I liked it. It made work seem such a beautiful, dignified thing, when it was done like that," she said.

She glanced at her watch. She knew by expe-

rience how quickly time flew when she was talking to Humphrey.

"No, don't look at the time; it's quite early," he said.

Now the wind had risen a little, ruffling the waves. They were small still, but not so small. They came tumbling in shoreward with greater energy. The tide was on the turn.

"If you had stayed here I feel we might have become great friends," said Humphrey. He knew it was unwise, unfair, but he wanted her to know that he had liked those hours they had spent together.

"Might we?" she said.

"Don't you feel it, too?"

"No, I'm so ignorant. And you know so much."

"I've knocked about the world for a good many years. One picks up a little surface knowledge," he conceded. "You'll do the same away from Pentarn."

"With two children to look after day and night?"

"I hope you'll find a better post soon, with more leisure. Italians are keen on letting their children learn English now. I should keep my eyes open if I were you."

"I would far, *far* rather stay here!" she said, with sudden passion. It seemed that in leaving Pentarn, in going away from Humphrey Willmot, she was deliberately closing the door upon all that life held of worth and loveliness.

"And I would rather, too, that you had stayed," said Humphrey; and this time he did not try to restrain the tenderness in his voice.

They were meagre crumbs of comfort—these tender, unsatisfactory scraps of sentiment he offered her now—but Ursula, asking nothing, found them strangely satisfying.

It was her very first experience of arousing inter-

est and attention in any man, and perhaps for this reason alone Humphrey would have attracted her. His personality, his ardent intelligence, something, too, that was extraordinarily winning in his manner, had completed the conquest of her. No one that resembled him in the least degree had hitherto crossed her path. And now that he had come, changing so wonderfully the color of her whole life, she was to go away from Pentarn. She never saw in these two practically simultaneous events any ulterior connection, never perceived therein the careful and deliberate scheming of her mother and sister. She saw it merely as a melancholy coincidence. They might have been friends, even great friends, as he had just now said, if she had only been able to remain in Pentarn. She might have contrived, perhaps, a little more leisure in which to meet him. She had often been reproved for her slowness and dawdling, but with such an incentive she could surely have accomplished her work with a greater celerity. Pentarn was so different now that Humphrey was there. It had become to her the home of living romance. He took her out of her little world of sordid cares, made her think, quickened her mind by sheer contact with his own. The foundations of Ursula's romance were miserably small, but the very narrow conditions of her life inevitably made her exaggerate them.

"Perhaps I may even come to Italy next winter," he said. "I do sometimes spend a few weeks in Rome on my way home. And then I shall look you up, Miss Finch."

"Oh, will you really? It would be very kind. I am sure that I shall be longing to see an English face!"

He laughed.

"And if you're not happy I shan't let you stop,

you know," he told her now, half in jest and half in earnest.

"I know I shan't be happy, but I shall pretend to be. You see, I'm expected to be a nice bright girl—that's what Madame Garroni wants, to look after her children."

He made a little grimace.

"And are you not a nice bright girl?" he inquired.

"I don't think I am," she said very seriously. "I wish I were."

"It is a type I detest, if that is any comfort to you. But for companions and governesses, I suppose it is a necessity."

"She must have hoped I was fairly bright—she saw me," said Ursula, who could never quite understand why Madame Garroni had so quickly engaged her.

"No, she took you because she saw that you were young and beautiful and charming," he said.

Prudence deserted him a little as he made this rash speech. But he longed to put a little wholesome conceit into her. She had suffered all her life from that close, daily comparison to Daphne.

Ursula rose to her feet. She was a little stiff from sitting there so long. The church bell struck suddenly upon her dismayed ears.

"Oh, I shall be late!" she cried, in distress.

"Late! What for?" he inquired.

"For the evening service; they are always angry with me if I am late. There is no excuse for me on Sundays, as I have nothing to do."

She began to climb the steep path that led up the cliff. The short grass was tangled with rosy patches of sea-pinks. Humphrey followed, a little irritated by her passion for duty. He had not said all that he had meant to say to her at this, their last interview.

CHAPTER XI

DAPHNE was on her way home from the Abbey, and because the evening was so fine she made a little détour before going in, and took the path that led across the cliffs to the rectory. She was nearing home, when she suddenly perceived two figures standing motionless near the edge of the cliff, overlooking the sea. Surely, that was Ursula! That slim, rather small silhouette of hers was unmistakable. But who could that be standing near her? Daphne walked forward quickly and very softly. The thought of coming upon her sister unawares amused her. She could picture Ursula's flushed, embarrassed guilty look at being "caught" talking to a man! Daphne was quite close to them before she became aware that the man was Humphrey Willmot.

What were they doing there together? Why was not Ursula in church? The bell had ceased to ring some minutes ago. Daphne thought, with a touch of jealousy, that they looked as if they had been standing there for a long time. They seemed immensely unconscious of everything around them. Ursula's back was turned to her, and of Humphrey she could only catch the merest glimpse of his profile. What were they talking about? What could Ursula find to say that could possibly detain any man more than five minutes? Daphne had small opinion of her sister's power of entertaining anyone. Was it possible that Humphrey really had a curious and inexplicable preference for Ursula's society?

Daphne approached slowly, and as she came up close to them she caught sight of Ursula's face, up-

turned to Humphrey's. It was fresh and glowing. The tired, strained, harassed look had gone out of it. She was a young girl again, and her grey eyes were shining with a soft, happy, and almost tender light. The slight sea-wind had disarranged her hair, which was always rather too primly and neatly dressed. She was smiling up at Humphrey with an eager, charming look. Nor could Daphne console herself with the thought that Humphrey appeared in the least degree bored. He was talking and smiling as if for him Ursula were the one person of importance in the whole world. Daphne knew what that look meant on the face of a man. It was the prelude to love, perhaps even to a declaration of love.

It was possible that but for Mrs. Willmot's warm interest in herself Daphne would have shrugged her shoulders at her sister's conquest and let things be. But she had resolved as soon as Mrs. Willmot's invitation had been given (and so fervently accepted) that she would win Humphrey's love. She would marry him, and be freed forever from all sordid financial cares. They would travel all over the world together, and Daphne would be the admired of everyone wherever she went. She had already pictured the frocks she would have—slender, fragile things, that would enhance the perfect symmetry of her figure; the jewels, the motors. She knew that Humphrey could give her all that she wanted. And he would take her away from Pentarn, from the small, shabby, unlovely rectory, the prevailing fretfulness and ill-temper, the perpetual worry about money. These thoughts had been in her mind at the precise moment when she had first discerned those two figures standing side by side upon the cliff, outlined against the sky. It was probably for this reason that she felt a dull, insensate

rage against her sister. What was she doing here upon the cliff on this heavenly spring evening with Humphrey Willmot? It was so unlike her to idle out of doors, to miss a service in the church.

"Good evening, Mr. Willmot. Why—Ursula!" Daphne's surprise was very prettily simulated, although it did not deceive Ursula in the least. She started and looked just as guilty and embarrassed as Daphne had hoped.

Daphne stood there, looking charming, with her fair hair, her dark blue eyes, her wild-rose coloring. Slight and straight as a wand she stood three or four inches taller than her sister.

"I've been having tea with your mother," she said to Humphrey. "I can't tell you what delightful plans she has been making. I'm to go with her when she leaves for London instead of joining her later. I am looking forward to it more than I can say. You can hardly realize what it means to a miserable country-mouse like myself!"

"I'm very glad if it gives you so much pleasure," said Humphrey, good-naturedly. "To a cockney like myself anything almost is preferable to spending June in London." He smiled at her indulgently. She was certainly very lovely. That skin of hers was so dazzlingly fair. "But I mustn't throw cold water, and I can promise you that you will enjoy it enormously. My mother nearly always has someone to stay with her for the season, to compensate her for her own lack of daughters. And if I'm to believe what her guests tell me, they have a simply ripping time."

"I never dreamed of such luck," said Daphne. "It's what I've wanted for years. I'm to sing, too; she said she could perhaps arrange that for a charity."

"You'll make a tremendous sensation," smiled

Humphrey. He could always say, quite sincerely, exactly what was expected of him, and he could not help being attracted by her gaiety, her youth, her eagerness.

"Oh, do you really think I shall? Do you think my voice will be worth listening to in London?"

Humphrey reflected. "I'm positive you'll find people only too ready to listen to you. Don't let them overwork you—that's all!"

She made a little *pas-seul* on the close cropped turf. Her movements were delicious.

"How awfully nice of you! Ursula, do you hear that?" She spoke to her sister for the first time.

Ursula smiled. She was so happy to-day that she wished every one else to be happy, too. Yet, it never occurred to her to envy her sister's good fortune. She herself would have been sick with nervousness at the thought of visiting the Willmots in London. But, of course, it was exactly what Daphne would like. She would have room to expand, to open and disclose to an admiring world those butterfly wings of hers. Ursula knew that she was dissatisfied and discontented at Pentarn. She derived little real happiness from those perpetual desultory flirtations that caused so much bitterness between herself and her father.

"Come along, Ursula, we ought to be going home. As we have missed church we shall imperil our lives if we are late for supper, too."

"I'll come part of the way with you if you'll let me," said Humphrey.

He walked beside the two girls, Daphne separating him from Ursula who had now relapsed into her usual silence, astonished at the quick way in which Humphrey had adapted himself to Daphne's very different conversation and point of view. She would not admit that it had hurt her a little. For, of course,

he must be accustomed to talking to many different types of women—the grave, the gay, the smart, the shabby, the pretty, the plain, the clever, and stupid! He would be certain to find something kindly and sympathetic to say to each one. The thought came suddenly to her mind: If Daphne goes to London she will see him every day. Yes, she would be under the same roof, would be admitted as far as a guest ever can be to the intimate family life, to a knowledge of those petty daily happenings, those little interests that all families possess. She would see Humphrey constantly, with his parents, with his friends. She would see the side of him that was familiar to his mother, surely a very lovable, charming side! And perhaps they would become great friends. He would forget those things he had heard of her in Pentarn, her selfishness, her extravagance, her foolish flirtations. Perhaps, he too, would end by falling in love with her. Ursula sighed. People nearly always did end by falling in love with Daphne, though hitherto no man who could afford to marry her had done so. She had seen it happen over and over again, had been quick to recognize the first symptoms. Only she didn't want it to happen now with Humphrey Willmot.

Humphrey parted from them at the gate. He wondered why Ursula had become so pale and silent. Only, perhaps, her pallor was the more noticeable against the brilliant dazzling fairness of Daphne.

"I am afraid this is really good-by," he said, taking Ursula's hand in his. "So I will say *bon voyage,* and I hope you will like Rome. I am sure we shall hear news of you sometimes through your sister." He looked at Daphne as he spoke.

"You shall hear when we do," said Daphne, smiling graciously. His interest would soon cool when

Ursula was safely across the seas. Separation was an excellent remedy, if a trifle drastic. Still Ursula's departure was a simply providential arrangement. She was glad they had been so quick to perceive the danger of keeping her at home. Humphrey would have found innumerable excuses for deserting London and running down to the Abbey had Ursula remained in Pentarn.

"Good-by," said Ursula.

She spoke timidly, aware of Daphne's sharp and critical scrutiny. She was almost afraid to look up into Humphrey's face.

"And if it's unbearable, remember what I told you!" said Humphrey gaily.

"Yes, I won't forget," answered Ursula. She turned away hastily, pushing open the wooden gate that led into the rectory garden. It was dreadful to have to say good-by like that, with Daphne watching. She felt a lump rising in her throat, and her eyes were burning with repressed tears. But Daphne was following her closely; it would be fatal to display any emotion.

"Mr. Willmot must have a singular attraction for you, my dear Ursula," said Daphne, as they passed into the hall. "I can not remember that you have ever ventured to stay away from church on Sunday evening before. However, I know I need not say anything, papa will know how to deal with it quite adequately. You *are* a sly little thing, though, stealing off to the cliffs like that. How long had you been there, I wonder, before I came upon you?"

"I don't know, Daphne," said Ursula. "Not very long—on the cliffs I mean." She looked up imploringly at her sister.

"Well, he did not seem to expect to see you again," resumed Daphne, "and, under the circumstances, I think that is quite as well. He might easily turn your silly little head."

"Oh, Daphne," said Ursula with sudden entreaty, "don't please tell them—papa and mamma, I mean. I'm going away so soon that it can't possibly matter."

Daphne's fair face hardened.

"Of course, I shall tell mamma. I never hide anything from her, as you know. I am not going to keep your silly secrets, Ursula. She had better warn Madame Garroni to keep a sharp eye upon you in Rome. I am sure it will be necessary. You must have bored that poor young man to extinction."

"He didn't seem bored," said Ursula.

"In any case he would be far too well-bred to show it. He has not been making love to you, has he?"

"Of course not!" said Ursula, indignantly.

Daphne smiled. "I am glad to hear that," she said coolly. "You see, I have a very special reason for asking. I mean to marry him myself. I am sure that his mother wishes it, too, for she gave me a pretty broad hint on the subject. You will have to learn to look upon him as a very kind brother-in-law; not that you will see very much of either of us when we are married."

She went lightly upstairs to her room.

CHAPTER XII

THE long hot and dusty journey was coming to an end. It seemed an eternity to Ursula since she had quitted Pentarn, very early on a cool May morning, with the wind blowing in lightly from the Atlantic. The green dusk of the Cornish woods had been lit here and there with the crimson flame of rhododendrons just beginning to blossom, and by the tall spires of fox-gloves that matched them so closely in color. Most of the interim had been spent in a black and suffocating inferno, except for the brief respite from whirling trains they had enjoyed while crossing the Channel. Madame Garroni traveled, for the sake of economy, by second class, and the trains as usual were crowded to overflowing. She had not stopped anywhere on the way except for an hour or two in Paris, where they had snatched a hasty meal before taking their seats in the Rome express. Sometimes she would buy food at the stations at which they stopped to appease the hunger of the little party. Ursula was not hungry, but she suffered cruelly from the thirst produced by swallowing so much coal-dust. They had spent two long interminable nights in the train, and there had been no room to lie down. Alda was sleepless and fretful, and the other passengers of varying nationalities had exhibited their wrath at being perpetually disturbed by her moaning cries. Rosina, who was more phlegmatic, slept better. Ursula had done her best to pacify the elder child; she had held her in her arms all through that dreadful second night, trying to hush her, and receiving no more thanks from Madame Garroni than a perfunctory: "How delightful to be so strong, Miss Finch. These

night journeys kill me. I am glad you bear them so well!"

It was past seven o'clock in the morning when they approached Rome. Dawn that day had shown Ursula the Mediterranean coast, wonderfully painted in monochrome varying from pearl-white to deepest grey, all outlined with a clearness that was absolutely new to her. Now as they drew near Rome she could see the lovely Alban hills colored in soft pale tones, the towns that lay upon their slopes being visible as patches of brilliant whiteness flung against the subdued background. Alda had at last fallen asleep in the corner, and Ursula crept out into the corridor. There was a little stir among the passengers, who were collecting their hand-luggage in view of their approaching arrival. Ursula leaned her head out of the window and drank in deep draughts of the fresh delicious air. It was of a pure invigorating quality, as if it had come straight from the mountains to bathe the Campagna with its cool refreshing waves, and it acted like a restorative to the tired girl. It seemed to give her strength and courage, to take away that sick and giddy feeling which those two long nights in the hot train had produced. Now she could see Rome lying out there in the middle of the plain. The Dome stood up, pale as a pearl, in all its noble, almost unearthly splendor. As Ursula recognized it Humphrey's quotation came back to her mind. The one work of man that partook of the grandeur of the works of God. Rome—the heart of Christendom! And of this heart was not the Dome perhaps the intimate and visible expression? It rose above the spreading town, above the clustered roofs and the houses that shone white and cream and orange and honey-colored in the morning sunlight. Among so many lesser domes it stood up with an aloof, proud immensity.

Yet there was something delicate, almost fragile, about it, in spite of its size. Its pale hue of lilac-grey seemed to harmonize perfectly with the silver and blue of the sky. Ursula looked at it, absorbed and fascinated. No one disturbed her. The children were fast asleep, and Madame Garroni still snored in her corner. And all Rome lay outspread before her, magical in its dazzling splendor, girdled by its spring mantle of brilliant green, a green that sometimes was sharp and almost violent in its effect. To the north a mantle of dark green dusk garmented the confines of the city, and beautiful ancient towers were outlined in pale silhouette against those distant woods. In the Campagna the poppies blossomed in broad scarlet-painted patches, a feast of color. There were glimpses of the river, pale, tortuous, a path of light. The Dome was much nearer now.

The train rushed into the station.

Now that the journey had really come to an end Ursula felt almost sorry. She knew that if she could only have made it alone and undisturbed it might have been one of the most delicious experiences of her life. The first sight of France, of Paris, the fields and vineyards, the laughing, blossoming orchards, the little villages with their clustering red roofs, and perhaps the spire or tower of a church set protectively in the midst, would have entranced her as the vision of some new and lovely world. The first glimpse of the Alps, splendid in the early morning light, clad in the majesty of their eternal snows—yes, she would have loved to let her eyes dwell upon them while she drank in their beauty. Then the long and suffocating tunnel in which she was hardly able to breathe; the first sight of Italy. The great towns of Turin and Genoa, the night journey along the coast, skirting Ma-

remma and the sea. The moonlight on the sea, a wonder of silver, paths of gleaming pallor upon a sea that rippled close to them like a great calm lake. She had seen these things only in fugitive glimpses. Little Alda crying and fretful with fever became every moment a more tedious burden. But already Ursula loved the child, who seemed to cling to her for consolation and comfort; the touch of the little warm body near her own awakened within her a curious maternal emotion.

Madame Garroni pinned on her hat.

"We must have two cabs," she said in a firm voice. "We can't all go in one with so much luggage." She called to a porter in rapid English-Italian. "Why, there is Guido!" she exclaimed. "I never thought he would turn out so early, he hates getting up!"

An elderly man, very stout and breathless, with grey hair, black eyes, and a rather luxuriant grey moustache, approached them. He was unshaven, and his dress was slovenly, as if his morning toilette had been of the briefest. He embraced his wife and the two children, and laughed at Alda, who began to cry because his moustache pricked her face. He grasped her more firmly in his arms and repeated the kiss as if it amused him, and seemed to resent the fact that she redoubled her weary cries under the process.

"Miss Finch, the new governess," said Madame Garroni, indicating Ursula. Garroni made a sweeping bow and took her hand.

"I hope you will like Rome very much indeed, 'mees'," he said, in very slow, careful English.

"Miss Finch had better take the children," said Madame Garroni, "and you and I will go on first with most of the luggage. Why did you not bring Mario? He would have been useful to get our things through the customs for us."

"I hope you have not brought a great deal," said Guido Garroni, with a touch of irritability; "it is very expensive to travel with so much."

"There is only the usual amount," replied his wife. "You would not wish me to come back empty-handed, would you? Things are cheaper in England, so I have saved the money in that way."

When they were all safely ensconced in the two cabs Ursula had the impression of being driven through endless streets, the wide, opulent streets of modern Rome, with their tram-lines, their immense shops, their gigantic palaces, which all mingled so oddly with the glimpses of ancient ruins she had had just after leaving the station. The vast red-brick walls of the Baths of Diocletian in a setting of brilliant spring green had attracted her attention. She was struck, too, as most people are upon first arriving in Rome, by the number and beauty of the fountains, although she was still unaware that to design a fountain was a task relegated to a master of sculpture in those bygone days when the arts so passionately flourished in Italy, and that Bernini, in the intervals of church building and decorating, made many a lovely fountain to touch to additional grace his beloved city.

The cab passed through an immense white-tiled tunnel brilliantly lighted with electric light. Noisy trams dashed through alongside of them, awakening Alda, who began to cry again, thinking that she was back in the train. The noise was hideous, and was made more unbearable by the warning bells of the trams that sounded almost ceaselessly. They emerged at last and went down a crowded street, rather narrow, and even at that hour crammed with traffic. They came quickly to the Piazzi di Spagna, and saw the tall flights of the Spanish steps ascending to the Trinità dei Monti, whose twin towers were outlined beautifully against the warm, rich blue of

the sky. At the foot of the steps the flower-sellers were already arranging their stalls under the shelter of great white umbrellas. A man drove up in a cab that was completely filled with great branches of peach blossom. Ursula turned away from this feast of color with a little sigh. Their cab turned down a side street and stopped at last before a tall house, near the river, but not facing it.

The second cab had already arrived, and Ursula saw Madame Garroni and her husband standing in the passage, which was rather dark and only vaguely illuminated by a solitary electric light.

Madame Garroni began to mount the stairs, and Guido, preparing to follow her, lifted Rosina in his arms. He turned to Ursula.

"Will you bring Alda, 'mees'?" he said. Then struck perhaps by the girl's pallor, her look of fatigue, he added: "You must be tired. I will come down to see about the luggage, the porter will look after it till then."

The stairs were both steep and interminable. It was with some difficulty that Ursula induced little Alda to scale them. They were marble steps and ascended flight after flight. Ursula was exhausted long before she reached the top, and Alda was crying again from the exertion imposed. At each landing Ursula hoped that Madame Garroni would pause; she was filled with that formless depression that commonly assails persons in new and unattractive surroundings. She had a longing to be alone that she might cry. Tears would relieve her.

They stopped at last before a door at the very top of the house. Garroni stepped forward and fitted a key into the lock. They entered a long narrow passage.

"Anna! Anna!" called Madame Garroni.

A stout, handsome girl, with black hair beauti-

fully dressed, appeared from a distant obscurity that Ursula afterward learned was the kitchen. She was carelessly attired in a loose cotton negligée, and she wore neither cap nor apron. She addressed Madame Garroni in a tone that sounded almost insolently familiar to Ursula's ears, although she did not of course understand the purpose of the speech. But she stooped and kissed the children in a hearty, affectionate way that displayed her evident devotion to them.

"Is the coffee ready?" said Madame Garroni. "We are all famished, and we must have it at once!"

"*Si, signora.* It is ready."

"Bring it into the dining-room at once."

"*Si, signora.*"

"Show the signorina to the children's room."

"*Si, signora.*"

The girl beckoned to Ursula and escorted her down the passage, which was long, uncarpeted, and rather dark. The floor was covered, as were all the floors in the flat, with red tiles. At the end of this passage she flung open a door. Ursula saw a room with one largish iron bed, painted brown, and two small cribs. There were two chairs, a wardrobe, a washstand, and a large chest of drawers, and as the room was not large, it had the appearance of being over-crowded with furniture. The walls were distempered and bare. The window looked out upon innumerable roofs, and beyond this there was no view.

Ursula looked at her bed with an agony of longing. It was not as yet quite nine o'clock, and she wondered how many hours would have to elapse before she could lay her head on the pillow and sleep—and sleep. For two nights she had not been to bed at all, and she had scarcely slept for a con-

secutive half hour. She had a feeling that if she did not obtain some sleep very soon she would go mad. The children, who had followed her into the room, began to squabble and cry. She turned to pacify them. Anna had already gone away to prepare the breakfast.

All Ursula's imaginings of what a Roman house would be like had been abruptly destroyed by the reality. She had pictured something large and spacious, opulent yet severe, in short the splendid ancient Roman palace with which novels and books of travel have made people sufficiently familiar. But this small and inconvenient flat perched at the top of a high and narrow house, approached by those apparently interminable flights of steep stairs, its rooms crowded to excess—as she soon discovered—with heavy, enormous furniture, that seemed to choke them and deprive them of light and air, was a very disagreeable revelation to her. Madame Garroni had, whether purposely or not, it would be difficult to say, given her quite a false impression of both her abode and her social standing. Her husband was employed in the shop of a large engineering firm, on whose business he also occasionally traveled, and he spent most of the day from home, returning, however, as a rule, for the mid-day meal. He was indolent and good-natured, although subject to fits of violent rage when anything annoyed him; he was devoted to his wife and children, especially to little Alda, who was so much more Italian in appearance than her sister. He belonged to the lower rather than to the higher *bourgeoisie*. Of social standing Madame Garroni had none; she was worse off in this respect than she had been at Penzance. She had carelessly drifted into the rather slovenly habits of the class into which she had married, and had become negligent and untidy in her

person. It was, of course, impossible for Anna to do all the work of the flat and to cook for seven people as well, and hitherto Madame Garroni had had to give her personal assistance and had also looked after the children herself. She had for some time past felt the need of someone young and capable, who was willing to help her in all these tasks. Someone cheap and tractable, and who could not bounce off at a moment's notice. All through the journey, especially when she saw how readily Ursula took charge of little Alda, she was congratulating herself upon the treasure she had, by such good fortune, secured. She was aware that in England Ursula would never have accepted a post in such a household; she would have aimed at something higher. She was a lady, and she had had too good an education to undertake so much for such a tiny salary. And then in England people didn't expect their nursery-governesses to do the work of a general servant.

There was a hasty meal of coffee and dry bread in the dining-room. Garroni had already had his coffee before coming to the station, but he sat with them for a few minutes smoking a long thin cigar of the kind that is called a *toscana,* the odor of which made Ursula feel rather sick after the prolonged shaking she had endured in the train. However, he was obliged to go away to his business soon, and an affectionate leave-taking was effected between him and his wife. Little Alda did not cry this time when he kissed her; she was too busy dipping the fingers of bread into her coffee, and then eating them. Ursula, unaccustomed to the foreign habit of "dipping," ate her bread, and found it very dry; she had some difficulty in finishing it. When the meal was over Madame Garroni told her to put the children to bed.

"They will be out of your way then," she said, "and it will give you more space in which to do your own unpacking and theirs. Anna must go and do the marketing. I will tell her to give you some hot water, the children need a good wash after their journey."

Ursula hoped that if she accomplished these tasks with sufficient celerity, she would be able to snatch an hour or two of sleep before luncheon. She took the children into the nursery, and Anna, with an air of protest, brought her a large jug of hot water. The children were already in bed when Madame Garroni put her head into the room.

"When you have done the unpacking here you can come and help me with mine," she announced, "for the present I am going to lie down. I am nearly dead."

It did not occur to her that Ursula was also nearly dead with fatigue. Dizzy and feeling sick and thoroughly unnerved, the girl began to open the trunks that contained her own and the children's things. She moved as noiselessly as she could, for Alda and Rosina had both promptly fallen asleep, and she did not wish to disturb them. She envied them their deep slumbers. When her task was done she crept upon her own bed and lay down. Surely Madame Garroni would still be resting. It could not be time as yet to go and proffer her assistance in the matter of unpacking. Ursula's eyes closed almost before her head had touched the pillow.

CHAPTER XIII

URSULA was roughly awakened by a series of sounds that penetrated across and mingled with her dream of traveling through a long, dark and noisy tunnel. A shrill cry, a banging door, a succession of loud and angry words aroused her definitely from her slumbers, and she felt a none too gentle hand seize her by the shoulder and give her a sharp shake. She looked up in terror, not realizing in the least where she was, and she saw bending over her the angry, heated countenance of Madame Garroni. Somewhere in the room the two children were crying querulously; it was the sound of their clamoring, unchecked and unsilenced, that had first aroused the attention of their mother, whose room was only just across the passage.

Madame Garroni seemed to have changed in a sudden, inexplicable manner. In place of the slightly over-dressed woman who had stared patronizingly at Ursula in the shabby Pentarn rectory, she appeared now with tousled hair all awry, and a face that had not been washed since her arrival. She was garbed in a loose cotton negligée of some faded green material, ornamented with sprigs that had once been mauve. She had flung off also something of that veneer of good manners which she had found necessary on the occasion of her visit to Mrs. Finch.

"Miss Finch! I am astonished at you! Did you forget my orders about the unpacking? I did not bring you out to Rome to sleep half the day!"

Ursula rubbed her eyes and descended slowly from the bed. In her stockinged feet she was considerably smaller than Madame Garroni, and she felt at a disadvantage.

"I did finish the unpacking," she said, in a bewildered tone, for she still felt giddy and unrefreshed. "The boxes are quite empty."

"Then why did you not come immediately to my room to help me with mine? Did you imagine you had come here to do a rest-cure?"

"I thought you were still asleep," said Ursula.

"You *thought!* What business had you to think? You are not here to think, you are here to do exactly what you are told! I never allow any servants of mine to sleep in the daytime."

Ursula overlooked the insult which the words implied. She was still apologetic, still a trifle ashamed of having fallen asleep and slept so soundly. She supposed that she had really done wrong, and that she deserved to be scolded. She had always lived at home, where she had been accustomed to continual reprimand, for the things she had done and the things she had not done; for the short-comings of Nicholas and Ruth which she was told she might have prevented with the exercise of a little sisterly forethought; for the way she spoke, and looked, and held herself. And she had come to think that it was her lot in life to fail, and then to be rebuked or punished for her failure. It had given her such a low opinion of herself that she accepted the blame as well-merited. Only Humphrey Willmot had ever praised and admired her, and had found no fault with her.

"I was so very tired after the journey," she said. "I have never made a long journey before. I have had no sleep for two nights."

She glanced at Alda. Wouldn't Madame Garroni remember perhaps that she had held the child in her arms all through that second night of their journey? Held her till she too grew hot and feverish with fatigue, till her head and eyes seemed to be

on fire, and her feet were stone-cold in the boots that had grown too tight for them.

"Well, I will overlook it this once," said Madame Garroni, in a more mollified tone. "Come and help me with my things. Yes, Alda and Rosina, you may come too, but you must be quiet and not quarrel, and not touch anything."

Two large trunks, besides various grips and hold-alls and bags, had to be dealt with. Certainly Madame Garroni had not stinted herself in the matter of fine wearing-apparel, even if her taste did frequently err in the matter of gaudy coloring. Some of the dresses were very fashionable, and there were some white embroidered ones that would have been more suited to Ursula's slim, girlish figure than to her own.

"In Rome it gets very hot in the summer, and we can not always go to the seaside, it is so costly. One really wants things that are suited to the tropics," she said, laying the white muslin dresses upon the bed. They were a little crushed.

"I dare say you will be able to iron them, Miss Finch. This girl I have now is rather stupid and untrained. I dislike ironing them myself—it makes one so hot!"

The unpacking was still very far from being accomplished when the front door opened and a man's heavy tread was heard in the passage. He shouted, "Arabella—Arabella!" giving the Italian pronunciation to his wife's name.

"There's Guido," she said, "and he'll want his lunch; he hates being kept waiting. It always puts him in a temper." She rose from her knees, and giving her head a hasty pat with her hand she went quickly out of the room. Ursula heard her go into the kitchen, and from the intonation of her voice

she concluded that she was scolding Anna for not being ready.

When they were all seated at table an aged woman came into the room and took her place between her son and Ursula. She was very deeply wrinkled and her skin looked like parchment. Her coarse, grey hair was still abundant, but she dragged it back from her forehead and temples in a manner that was quite merciless. She had small, piercing black eyes, that regarded Ursula with a kind of malevolent scrutiny. She was extraordinarily witch-like, and seemed to require only the traditional black cat and broomstick to complete her appearance.

Guido wished her good-morning and she nodded in reply. The conversation, which was at no time very animated, was carried on entirely in Italian, and so was incomprehensible to Ursula. Anna brought in the dishes and set them on the table, and Madame Garroni helped them all. When it came to Ursula's turn she gave her the most microscopic helpings, nor did she ever ask her if she would like a second portion. She and her husband and his ancient mother all drank wine, but Ursula was not offered any.

After luncheon Guido smoked a cigar, drank a large cup of black coffee, and then departed to his business. Madame Garroni told Ursula to put the children to bed for a couple of hours, and then to come and finish the unpacking. It was after four o'clock when this task was finally achieved, and then Madame Garroni said:

"You had better go into the kitchen and make the tea. I am sure Anna does not know how to make it properly. I used always to do it myself, but now that you are here I shall leave it to you."

Anna was sulky when Ursula came into the kit-

chen. She pretended at first not to understand what she wanted, and Ursula was unable to find anything she required without her assistance. After some searching she succeeded in discovering the tea in a large glass-stopped bottle. There was a gas-ring, and she put the kettle on to boil. Anna, no longer able to pretend ignorance of what was required, now produced a tin of stale biscuits and some slices of bread. Ursula put everything on a tray, and Anna carried it sullenly into the sitting-room.

All the time Ursula could not help thinking: "So I am really one of the servants. I wonder when she will let me go to bed. I am so tired that if they would only let me go to bed I would not ask for anything more to eat to-day!"

"You must wake the children and make them tidy. They have their tea with us, it saves trouble." Madame Garroni's voice was sharp and authoritative. She hoped that Ursula was not going to prove tiresome and indolent.

Ursula drank a cup of tea, but she felt that food would choke her. The day's work was, however, not yet over. After tea Madame Garroni said:

"The children must go out or they won't sleep. You must take them up to the Pincio. Anna can go with you to-day, to show you the way."

Anna grumbled when she received the order to show the "mees" the way to the Pincio. She had hoped that now the "mees" had come she would be absolved from having to take the children out. She was fond of children—as indeed nearly all Italians are—but she had a strong objection to being made to wheel a perambulator, and until quite lately little Rosina, who was supposed to suffer from weak ankles, had always had to be wheeled up the hill. Anna considered it derogatory to have to push a perambulator. But the "mees" being English

would not mind. The English were a strange people. In her heart she thought the "mees" must be very foolish, indeed, to come so far in order to act as *bambinaia* to the signora's children.

It was a steep hot walk up to the Pincio. Although it was only May, the sun had considerable power, and coming, as she did, from the bleak and bracing climate of Pentarn Ursula felt unusually exhausted by the heat. Her clothes were rather too heavy for the season, and her boots, which she had worn almost continuously for nearly three days, hurt her feet. But on the Pincio there was a delicious breeze that stirred like music in the tall pines and ilex-trees, and did certainly assist in reviving her. A band was playing, and people were loitering about, singly or in groups. Swift beautiful motors were to be seen, and in some of them Ursula caught glimpses of lovely dark-eyed Italian women accompanied by dainty doll-like children. Around her she saw many girls with charming, smiling, happy faces. There were ecclesiastical students, moving in groups apart from the rest; gay young officers in effective uniforms; prettily-clad children accompanied by smart English nurses in starched white attire and close black bonnets.

The scene was completely new to Ursula, she had known nothing in all her previous experience to which she could compare it. She had never been in Hyde Park on a sunny June day, or watched the London children at play in Kensington Gardens. But it told her of wealth and ease and, above all, of leisure. There seemed to be no tired faces. For the most part these were people who need never be tired unless they exerted themselves too strenuously in the cause of pleasure. They drove about in swift, sumptuous motors, receiving their friends, amusing themselves. With a shock she remembered that this

was Humphrey's world. Had he been there he would perhaps have discovered many friends, and he would never have looked for her among them. If he had done so he would have found her wheeling Rosina in her little mail-cart, keeping watch upon Alda, who was, however, still too tired to stray far from her side. She was conscious of a group of English nurses, eyeing her a little distance away, perhaps wondering who she was, so obviously English and strange.

It was the beauty of the scene that held her transfixed at last as the hour of sunset drew near, and the sky to the west became one broad blaze of crimson and gold. Against it the Dome of St. Peter's was outlined clearly in dark purple. Monte Mario to the north was washed in the pink glow that enveloped the whole of Rome, the clustered roofs, the innumerable domes and spires, the masses of cream-colored houses that lay huddled at her feet. It was wonderful in its splendor, and she thought she could never forget it. She had never seen anything so beautiful before, and it took her out of herself, and made her forget all the petty worries and troubles of the day. It evoked in her a courageous determination to make the best of things, to work hard and diligently, and in this way to please her employer, although she knew that this could never be an easy matter. Madame Garroni was a woman who was obviously bent on exacting her pound of flesh, and already she had made considerable demands upon Ursula's strength. Still she had come here to work, and not to be idle; to earn her salary, and to relieve her parents. But she could not allow herself to think of Pentarn this evening. It was too soon, the pain of leaving them all, especially Ruth, who had utterly broken down at the parting, was too recent. And in the same

way she knew that it would be wisest never to let her thoughts wilfully dwell upon Humphrey Willmot. He had passed out of her life. She could never be grateful enough to him for all his kindness, for his sympathetic interest in her, above all for the books which she had hidden away in a drawer, hoping that some day she might have leisure to read them. Nearly a week had passed since she had said good-by to him at the gate, and it seemed to her like an eternity. She was wise enough to see that her life was set in quite different paths from his, and that to contemplate him too frequently would only weaken her high resolve to make the present work she had to do a success.

She rose suddenly from the stone seat on which she had been sitting gazing at Rome lying under that wonderful crimson sky.

"Come, children," she said, "it is time to go home."

As she wheeled little Rosina down the hill a jangle of sweet bells fell upon her ear. They seemed to be echoed from every church tower in Rome. It was the evening *Ave Maria* ringing through Rome at sunset.

CHAPTER XIV

ONE of the clearest impressions that Ursula always retained of those first days in Rome was the inexplicable, silent, but quite obvious hostility displayed toward herself by old Signora Garroni.

She was unconscious of having said or done anything that could possibly offend her, and she had almost concluded that she had aroused one of those reasonless dislikes which may affect anyone, and which have no basis beyond that of a personal antipathy. Perhaps she did not like English people. In any case, Ursula often found the old woman's eyes fixed curiously upon her with a look of disapproval that at first discouraged her.

She never, however, saw her except at meals, for Signora Garroni kept to her room during the rest of the day. It was a small dark room, overlooking the courtyard and the backs of the other flats that surrounded it on all sides. This outlook, a sufficiently gloomy one, was shared only by Mario's room and the kitchen. Madame Garroni had insisted upon retaining the pick of the rooms for herself and her children.

However, Ursula was not long left in the dark about this and also about certain other matters which at first had bewildered and perplexed her. She observed, almost at once, that Guido Garroni and his mother were not at all on good terms. Sometimes, in the evening especially, he would sit with her in her room for a short time, and then loud voices, raised in heated altercation, could be heard. They were evidently quarreling. As for Madame Garroni she took scant notice of her mother-in-law, and her manner toward her was so abrupt as to

sound uncivil. Ursula was still wondering if these things would ever be adequately explained to her, when the arrival of Mario Linelli upon the scene helped to clear up much that was mysterious and bewildering.

Ursula was on the Pincio with her two charges one hot evening at the beginning of June, when a young, athletic-looking man sauntered up to her. He lifted Alda up in his arms and kissed her, and then performed the same ceremony with Rosina. It was evident that he was no stranger to Alda, although little Rosina had almost forgotten him. Alda cried out in a tone of great joy: "Uncle Mario! Uncle Mario!" and clung to his hand.

A rapid conversation took place in Italian with the two children, and then little Alda rather shyly indicated Ursula, who sat there watching the little scene.

She did not know why, but she had always rather dreaded the return of Mario. The flat seemed hopelessly over-crowded as it was, and Anna's hands were already so full that it gave Ursula extra work to do, for she was always being asked to go and help in the kitchen. She was afraid, too, that the young man, when he did come, might take a violent dislike to her, just as his grandmother had done. Mario was the only child of old Signora Garroni's daughter, who had died when he was born. His father had died not long afterward, and so he had been practically brought up by his grandmother, who adored him.

He came up to her now with a bright, winning smile, and held out his hand. He was young, perhaps about her own age, and he was very good-looking. He was thin and tall, with very thick dark hair and large, wide-open brown eyes.

"How do you do, 'mees'?" he said, in quite good

English; "I heard you had come to Rome with my aunt."

"Yes," said Ursula; "we arrived last week."

"I am Mario. You must have heard them speak of Mario?"

"Yes, I have heard of you."

He sat down by her side on the low stone seat, and began to chatter quite confidentially.

"I hope you will be happy in Rome, 'mees'," was his first remark; "there is very much to interest you here. I hope my aunt is not too strict with you. She keeps us all in order, but my uncle is very wise; he does not make a fuss. I have come home now for a few weeks."

"Yes?" said Ursula. She felt slightly embarrassed by the frank scrutiny he bestowed upon her. No man had ever looked at her in that way before except Humphrey Willmot. And even Humphrey had never bestowed upon her such a searching glance that certainly betrayed more curiosity than admiration. Yet, there was admiration, too, for Ursula, despite her raven black hair and dark grey eyes, had the fair skin of the north, which always excites a wondering admiration in the sons of the south.

He was thinking she was really very pretty, and she looked quiet and serious and good. His grandmother had told him that she was a heretic—a pastor's daughter—and that her coming would put an end to all hope of the children being brought up as Catholics. He had just come from that interview, during which she had wept and told him that there was nothing left for her to do but to die. Guido's wickedness was going to be visited upon his poor little children. This English "mees," she assured him, would only aid and abet Arabella in her fixed determination to bring up her children as Protest-

ants. Probably it was for that reason she had chosen a clergyman's daughter to be their nurse. She stormed and raved over this last disaster, and Mario had some difficulty in pacifying her. She would always go back to the past when Guido was a little boy, so pious, so devout, an altar-boy, who never missed his monthly communion. But when he grew up he got into bad company, and was persuaded to join the Freemasons. And since then he had given up practising his religion, and was angry if he heard it mentioned. He owed his advancement to the Freemasons, and now he went in fear of offending them. That was why he refused to let his children be baptized by the priest.

Mario had heard all this countless times, but it never failed to arouse extremely uncomfortable feelings within him. He was very fond of his grandmother, and he pitied her deeply, but he longed for peace in his home. He secretly disliked Arabella almost as much as she did, and Guido was an object of both horror and compassion to him. It was an uncomfortable position for a young man to live in this house so divided against itself, and he had a great longing to know what sort of an impression it had produced upon this young English girl who had been flung so suddenly into their midst.

What did she think of this strange Italian household? What was there in the personality of Arabella to tempt or encourage her to come so far? She was poor, of course, he could tell that from the shabbiness of her shoes, of her general attire. But something told him that although poor, she was undoubtedly *signorile,* and must have sprung from a very different class from that to which his aunt belonged.

He began to ask her about her journey, and was horrified to find she had spent two nights in the

train without any adequate rest, occupied for the most part in looking after little Alda.

"My aunt never has any consideration for others," he told her; "no servant ever stays very long with her. She is often reduced to doing all the cooking and housework herself because the maid has left at a moment's notice! Now that you are here I suppose she will make you do the work instead."

"But I am not a cook," she protested; "I am a nursery-governess, and she only engaged me to take entire charge of the children."

"Do you think that will matter to her? You don't know my aunt, if you think she will care about that. You will be sent off to the kitchen one of these fine days. May I ask, please, what made you come? Could you not go to nice people in your own country?"

"It just happened," confessed Ursula, "her sister lives near us in Cornwall. I wasn't looking for anything, but she came one day and asked me to go back to Rome with her. I didn't want to come, but my parents wished it. I had to do as I was told."

So she had come against her will! Why had she not rebelled? What brutes her parents must be!

"I am going to tell you frankly that it was a great pity you came. No, Alda, run away, I am talking to 'mees.' I will talk to you presently if you will go and play with Rosina now. Let me see, what was I saying?"

"You told me," said Ursula, "that it was a pity I had come." She was both pained and disturbed by his frank statement, yet she felt that he had not meant to be unkind or discouraging. Why wasn't she a success? Why was her failure taken for granted in this way? She longed to ask him.

"You see in the family we don't like Arabella," he continued; "we think Guido would have done better to have married an Italian wife, who could have helped him. Now his children are being brought up as Protestants."

"I am a Protestant myself," said Ursula, quietly.

"Yes, I heard that you were. Arabella is against the Catholic religion; that was no doubt one of her reasons for bringing you. But it will not help these poor children, will it?"

"Still, they are half English. Why shouldn't they be brought up in their mother's faith? We Protestants are not heathens." She was a little indignant.

"They are Italian," he said abruptly, "and they have been deprived of their most precious heritage. You will think I am very bigoted and strict, but I am not the only one who feels it. My poor old grandmother is utterly miserable. You see she spends half her life praying for Guido and his children, and now that you have come she feels that there is one person more to fight against her."

"Why should she think that? I am not going to interfere. I only do what Madame Garroni tells me." Ursula spoke warmly. The feeling that she was not welcome in the Garroni family humiliated her. She felt, despite her dependent position, greatly their superior.

"No, you won't interfere, but you'll crystallize existing conditions. You'll make it, in short, impossible for my grandmother to interfere."

"Look there." He waved his hand—a long, slight hand—in the direction of St. Peter's, outlined splendidly against the warm blue of the Roman sky. "Look at the Dome—at all the smaller domes that strew Rome from end to end. Look at the hundreds of churches, dating, some of them, from

the very days of the apostles! It's that faith we desire for ourselves and our children, and whoever tries to give them anything else—anything less than the whole truth—is giving them a *stone* instead of the Living Bread!" His eyes were shining.

She was reminded, almost against her will, of Humphrey Willmot. Only he had never spoken with this passion, a passion born, as she knew, of true knowledge.

"Do you know that people have called those very domes Rome's reply to the Reformation? She built, she taught, she founded her fighting, preaching Orders—Jesuits, Oratorians, and the rest! Not cloistered any more, but coming out into the world to teach, to save."

"You believe in it then?" she said.

He had given her a glimpse of something larger than anything she had known at Pentarn. Something that filled the world. You met it wherever you went in Rome. Mario's words had carried her away. She seemed to breathe a freer air. It was this then of which Crashaw, the convert-poet, had written:

> Look up, languishing soul! Lo, where the fair
> Badge of thy faith calls back thy care,
> And bids thee ne'er forget
> Thy life is one long debt
> Of love to Him, Who on this painful tree
> Paid back the flesh He took for thee.

"Yes, yes, I believe in it. One is careless, one forgets, but it is always there, calling to us, calling like a voice." His face was turned away from her. "However far we stray it nearly always calls us back, at least before we die."

Ursula was aware then that he possessed something that she had not, something that on the spiritual plane was both vital and powerful. It was something that could rule and govern and sway,

and color all one's life and thoughts. Many things that Humphrey had said came back to her then. But he had only spoken with partial knowledge. Mario had the deeper knowledge of the man who was a Catholic, who valued his heritage of faith, and conceived it as an irremediable disaster that his uncle's children should be deprived of it.

He had shown her, too, the reason for the inexplicable hostility which old Signora Garroni had displayed toward her.

It was the hour of sunset, always the signal for their return home. There was a lovely rose-colored light painting the western sky, and against it Monte Mario with its thick woods of pine trees was darkly stenciled. The Dome stood up pansy-colored, dominating the whole scene. The long ridge of the Janiculum made a straight line sharp as a sword's edge against the sky. And below at their feet the beautiful city lay outspread, golden, honey-colored, grey and cream, a vision of proud domes and towers and ancient roofs.

The *Ave Maria* bells began to ring from every church tower, and Mario sprang up, crossed himself and muttered some prayers. Little Alda ran up to him and followed his example, while Rosina looked on with a puzzled expression on her fair baby face. Mario bent down and kissed Alda. "So you haven't forgotten *carina?*" he said, with a queer husky tone in his voice.

"No, but Rosina has."

"Rosina will remember better when she's older."

"We must be going," said Ursula, at once touched and slightly puzzled by the little scene. She longed to ask Mario why he had prayed when the church bells rang those three sharp notes, which were so quickly followed by four others, and then by five. It was all immensely puzzling, and unlike Pentarn.

"Here Rosina, get into your mail-cart. You're getting too big to be wheeled about like this. No, 'mees,' I shall wheel her down the hill myself, she's far too heavy for you."

At the dark entrance to the house he took leave of them.

"I told Arabella that I should not be in to dinner to-night," he said; "but perhaps to-morrow we shall meet again."

He kissed the children, and then lifting his hat made a bow and walked back into the street.

CHAPTER XV

MARIO made a frequent habit of meeting Ursula and the children on the Pincio toward the end of the evening, and of wheeling little Rosina down the hill. Whether Madame Garroni knew of these meetings or not it was difficult to say, but in any case she made no comment. She could very easily have learned about them from the children, but Ursula soon discovered that Alda, the elder and more intelligent of the two, was a little afraid of her mother and never talked to her frankly.

Ursula learned from Mario a great deal about the Garroni household, of which she might otherwise have remained in perfect ignorance. She knew now that he was the only child of Guido's sister who had died when he was born, and that he had been piously brought up by his old grandmother. It was only since Guido's marriage that he and Signora Garroni had come to live with him in Rome, and the arrangement was not a particularly happy one, although it was an economical one for all parties. The flat just held them all, and rents were very high in Rome. Mario also informed her that he was twenty-four years of age—she had imagined him to be even less—and was an electrical engineer, and a great believer in the future of the "white coal" as it is called in Italy. He had spent a year or two in America, where he had learned to speak English. He was the least affected of anyone by the discomfort of the household, for like most Italians he preferred to take his meals in a restaurant, and only returned home to sleep.

It was he, too, who first informed Ursula that Garroni was a Freemason, saying it too in such a tone that she perceived it meant for him the lowest

depth of moral iniquity. She was astonished at this attitude.

"But why shouldn't he be one? Heaps of people —well-known people—in England are Masons."

Mario looked at her with his grave, steady, young eyes.

"I believe in England they are not affiliated to the Grand Orient, which governs them here and in France. In a Protestant country they may matter less, they have sworn no enmity to the Protestant church. Here a Freemason must give up his religion. That is why it has been called the devil's church, erected to oppose the Church of Christ. A Freemason will not permit a priest to enter his house, either to baptize his children or to give the last Sacraments to a dying member of his household. That is what they are out to destroy." He indicated, with a slight bow of his head, the Dome, with the immense buildings of the Vatican palace grouped around it.

Something in his manner filled Ursula with an uncomfortable sensation, as if she had suddenly become aware of the existence of dominating sinister forces. *The spirits of wickedness in the high places.* She had often wondered what St. Paul had really meant by that. *Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness.* Was that warfare still continuing? Mario's speech had imbued those very words with a new significance that was almost terrifying. She had yet to learn that the activity of that same spirit of evil is never so fiercely, so tirelessly energetic, as in those countries where the Catholic Church holds open and sole spiritual sway.

She shivered a little in spite of herself. And

something in the attentive attitude of this Protestant "mees" encouraged Mario to proceed.

"I had a friend—we were working in the same town in the Veneto—and one day he told me that he had never been baptized, he knew nothing of our holy religion. His mother was dead, and his father was a Freemason, and would not even permit his children to pronounce the name of God. There are no fanatics so fierce, so tyrannical, so intolerant as the Freemasons. Little by little I taught Stefano—that was my friend's name—a good deal, and I introduced him to a priest. I went away, and some months later he told me that he had been baptized, had made his confession and his first communion. I could tell by his letters that he was very happy. Then he went home for a holiday. His father lived in Florence. Of course, he did not tell anyone except one of his sisters, who had also secretly become a Catholic. Then he fell ill, and the doctor told them all that he was dying. His sister went to a priest and begged him to come. The priest dressed himself in plain clothes and went round to the house. He knew if he were to go dressed as a priest that he would never be admitted. But though the father opened the door to him and he believed that he recognized him, he allowed him to go up to Stefano's room. The boy made his confession, and received Extreme Unction and the Viaticum. He made a most holy death. When the priest was going away the father went up to him and thanked him. 'I know who you are,' he said, 'and I thank you for coming dressed as you are. Had you come dressed as a priest I could not have admitted you, it would have compromised me with my employers. But I knew my son wished for a priest, I guessed that he had become a Catholic, because he has continually during his illness recited prayers aloud to

Our Lady, and made repeated acts of contrition. So I thank you for coming.' That is a true story, and it will give you some idea of the horrible tyranny these men exercise over those who are in their toils. And then people talk of the tyranny of priests who desire only to make them the bondmen of Christ!"

He took Ursula into a new world. Never before in her life had she heard mention of such things as these, of the ceaseless activities of diabolical agencies to capture and enslave the souls of men. *The spirits of wickedness in the high places.* Not human agencies, not enemies of flesh and blood, open and apparent, but secret, malignant forces, armored to fight against the Church of Christ, ever seeking to undo the work of the Redemption.

This religion of which Mario was now speaking to her was a living vital force; it seemed to have no connection at all with the one which was practised at Pentarn, chiefly on Sundays. It was something that ruled and controlled the lives of men, suavely and yet powerfully, actuated by the sole aim of saving their souls. Confession, prayers to Our Lady, Extreme Unction and the Viaticum—these surely were numbered among the Errors of Rome against which Mr. Finch's diatribes had been so frequently pronounced. But Pentarn and its standards seemed very far away from Ursula at that moment. She felt for the first time as if Pentarn had cast her out. She was freed from it, her life was in her own hands to make and shape as she would. Here was a wider world, where the Eternal Truth was at war with the Father of Lies.

One day, however, Mario showed a certain tactlessness by saying abruptly:

"Perhaps some day you will become a Catholic,

Miss Finch. My grandmother is always praying for your conversion."

Ursula was startled, even angry, at the suggestion.

"Never!" she said energetically. "You must tell her please to put such a thought out of her head."

She felt now as if during the past days Mario had secretly been trying to convert her. The thought annoyed her intensely. She had fallen into the trap, had listened when he spoke, as he constantly did, of his religion, had displayed an interest in it because he was so tremendously in earnest. She was angry, too, because she knew that this same possibility had not always been remote from her own thoughts. She had fought against it, and had never entered one of the Roman churches, even as a sightseer. She had been afraid of their effect upon her.

Mario was immediately contrite.

"Have I said anything to displease you?" he asked.

"Yes. You have made me feel as if you had all this time been trying to convert me. You don't know how I have been brought up to regard Rome. When one has been brought up like that it would indeed be foolish to accept the first different point of view with which one may come in contact."

"Am I really the first person to speak to you of the Catholic religion as of something good and beautiful—and divine?" he asked, wonderingly.

"You are the first Catholic to do so," she replied, not unmindful of certain things which Humphrey Willmot had said during their long conversations on Pentarn cliffs.

Like so many Italians, Mario was inclined to imagine that the conflict between the Catholic and Protestant Churches in England was far more acute than it really is, and also that it occupied a far more

prominent position in the life of the nation. He knew nothing of the innumerable quiet, often remote, parishes with which England is strewn from end to end, where the doctrines embodied in the Thirty-Nine Articles have been presented for more than three centuries without anything much in the shape of controversy coming to disturb them. The religion in honor of which so many of those ancient churches and chapels were originally built is forgotten by the people who attend them, and its continued existence in other places is scarcely recalled. The altar-crosses, the holy-water stoups, and other signs of that past worship may still evoke a certain antiquarian interest. But the Protestant congregations who have succeeded the devout Catholics of the past are not in conflict with Rome, because they are so often ignorant of her, and indifferent where not actually ignorant. Rome stands for something foreign, if, indeed, it is ever remembered at all. Mario, however, believed that the whole of the Church of England was represented by the High Church party, eternally in conflict with Rome. He was curiously ignorant of the Broad and Low Churchmen who form equally substantial parties within the establishment and are represented by bishops and clergy serving under the same flag and theoretically teaching precisely the same Protestant doctrines as their High Church brethren. He had come in contact with High Church people while on his travels, and a subsequent perusal of the Thirty-Nine Articles had bewildered him not a little, it was so difficult to reconcile what they were required to believe with what they, according to their own showing, taught. That those Articles were for the most part very violently and bitterly anti-Catholic, he could not fail to see, although he had been assured that they were not binding on the laity, and

more than one clergyman had wished to explain them to him "historically." If no one believed them why were they retained, and why were the clergy bound to make a public avowal of belief in their contents? He questioned Ursula, and found that she did believe them, had been in fact trained and brought up to believe them. They were what her father taught from the pulpit in Pentarn church.

"It is wonderful then that you do not hate us more," said Mario wistfully. He seemed to see her now as a soul submerged in darkness, and yet what a beautiful soul hers was!

"I do not hate your religion. We have some points in common. We believe in the same Redemption."

"Yes, that is true," said Mario.

Her face still wore a grave, almost stern look. She felt as if she had been unconsciously and unsuspectingly playing into Mario's hands. They were very clever and subtle, these Italians. He had led her on little by little, and she was glad that he did not know how constantly her thoughts dwelt upon the subject of the Catholic Church. There was the Dome to remind her of it daily. There were the *Ave Maria* bells, the *De Profundis* bells, calling the faithful to prayer at regular hours of the day. There were the shrines at the street corners with their pictures of the Madonna and Child to appeal to the passer-by. In Rome at least you could never get away from these things, from the suggestion they offered, from even a kind of clamorous, spiritual appeal, inseparable from them.

She became aware that Mario was speaking.

"Now I am going to tell you something in great confidence. I must have your promise first not to betray me."

"I think I would rather not hear any secrets."

In her nursery days secrets had been strictly forbidden, and even to be suspected of harboring one might entail a sharp punishment. Ursula was still inclined to regard them therefore as guilty, prohibited things.

"No?" he said in astonishment. He was Latin enough to adore the very hint of a mystery. "Still I think if you would consent you might one day find the knowledge very useful. It is about my two little cousins, Alda and Rosina."

Seeing he wished it so much she made the required promise.

"You may tell me. I promise that I won't tell," she said. She despised herself for giving in, for allowing herself to be influenced by him.

"My uncle Guido refused to have his children baptized. I believe they were both christened in a Protestant church, the Freemasons don't mind that! But one day when they were both quite little my grandmother and I took them to the Parroco and had them baptized, conditionally of course."

"Wasn't that very underhand—very wrong?" she asked.

"Underhand? Wrong?"

"I mean, you did something that you knew their parents would have objected to."

"Are these innocent children to suffer because their father is a bad Catholic?" demanded Mario, angrily. "We are not fighting against poor Guido, he is really more weak than bad. But we wished to defeat the devil, whom he has allowed to control his affairs. We were determined that these poor babies should not forfeit their eternal inheritance."

Ursula had known many unchristened babies in Pentarn. They had perhaps been weakly, and had died before they could be brought to church to be christened. No one was horrified if they died in

that state. And although for a second Mario's words made her feel uncomfortable, she could not yet believe that "it mattered very much." She could never remember hearing her father say that it mattered at all. And surely he would know. A little ugly doubt crept, however, into her heart. Mario was obviously so convinced that these things really did matter, more than anything else in the world.

"Their mother never knew?" she asked, with a vague feeling that Madame Garroni had been badly treated.

"Certainly not; she would be very angry. Guido gave her leave to bring them up as Protestants, and she does take them to her church sometimes when the weather is fine."

"How can you all live together?" said Ursula impulsively.

Mario looked slightly surprised.

"Why shouldn't we? My grandmother likes to be there, she's always hoping for an opportunity of getting hold of the children. And she is quite dependent upon us. Guido has little beyond what he earns, so he could not give her an allowance. My aunt has an assured income which she dislikes spending on anyone but herself, but she cannot please herself in the matter, as in Italy the husband has the power to administer his wife's fortune. We all pay our share of the rent and the household expenses. Guido insisted that Arabella should defray the whole cost of the journey to England this year, but that was because he did not wish her to go. I am glad myself that she went." His frank dark eyes rested upon her with a friendly expression. "Although you are not a Catholic I believe you will have a good influence over those two children. They are already different since you came, and yet you are always kind to them. You will train them care-

fully. Some of the English ways are admirable—you know the value of discipline, of self-control. It is not for the Latin—at least not in the same measure." He puckered his brow in a frown. "You can do a great deal if you will for these babies."

"Yes. What you have told me will make no difference. I shall continue to do all I can to make them happy." Her voice was steady. She was beginning to forgive Mario; he was so absolutely single-minded. His only desire was that Alda and Rosina should not be deprived of their heritage of faith; he wished to benefit them spiritually as well as morally, to equip them for the tremendous task of life, that required, as she knew, so much courage, so much self-sacrifice. He looked at things from a totally different angle from that of Humphrey Willmot, and yet their conclusions were strangely alike. Only Mario was within the Fold, its gifts were his proud heritage, to guard and defend, since every Catholic is perforce a soldier in the cause of his Church. Whereas Humphrey stood, as it were, on Pisgah, gazing from afar on the Promised Land.

The Promised Land. As those words came into Ursula's mind she had a quick instant thought that arose almost against her will as if it had been imposed upon her from without, by some strong exterior force. "Shall I ever go there, I wonder? But, of course, I shall!" She colored violently as if she had been discovered in the indulgence of some guilty secret thought, and she turned her head abruptly away. For of course it was absurd. She had never felt the slightest inclination to become a Catholic, or to learn anything further about the Catholic Church. Even here—in the heart of it, the home of it—it had made no appeal to her. The Dome attracted her in some way she could not understand; she preferred to believe that the attraction was a

sentimental one, because of Humphrey's words to her. She raised her eyes and looked at it now, heavily violet against a sunset sky that to-night was rather stormy in its splendor. Yes, it was beautiful, dominating; in its power and strength it was symbolic of that rock for which the great basilica stood. The Rock—St. Peter. The thrilling words flashed back to her mind. *"Thou art Peter, and upon this Rock I will build My Church."* She tried to free herself from the strong influences that held her then. Mario's words had produced this change in her. What a fool to let herself be so easily moved! She wished that she had not looked at the Dome just then. It seemed to her almost like a sentient thing, with a voice that called to her.

It was so clear to her that Mario had believed she would ultimately help him in the matter of Alda and Rosina. He had made that wistful appeal, as if imploring her to be on his side, to fight with him for those two innocent and precious souls. And how could she help, placed as she was in a position so dependent it was scarcely better than that of an under-servant? She could do nothing literally without their mother's knowledge. And then she oughtn't to want to help. Why couldn't they be brought up as Protestants as she herself had been? Why should one Church vaunt herself over all the rest as the true Church of Christ? What right had it to do so? *"And on this Rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."* Was St. Peter alarmed at the awful responsibility thrust upon him, as a recompense perhaps for his magnificent, simple avowal of faith? Did he shrink from the fiery task imposed upon him? Her thoughts swerved aside to contemplate this new issue.

"I am glad that you are not altogether against

me," said Mario. "You make me even feel that some day we may see more eye to eye in this matter than we do now. Rome has a great deal to teach you, Miss Finch. Don't close your ears and eyes against her." He smiled in his winning, boyish way.

Alda and Rosina came back to them from their games under the ilex-trees. He kissed them both gravely.

"Now we must all go home."

Over Monte Mario the sun had set splendidly, the storm clouds had passed, and a liquid golden light flooded all the sky, and was reflected here and there upon the pale clustered houses, the lifted towers. The Dome stood up in dark and shadowy immensity.

Ursula walked down the path with the children one on each side of her. Mario followed, scarcely speaking. From a hundred belfries the bells were ringing the *Ave Maria*. Something of the solemnity of the hour had touched the little group. To Ursula it seemed as if one vast prayer were being borne up to the throne of God to the accompaniment of those clashing bells.

CHAPTER XVI

MADAME GARRONI watched Ursula very narrowly during those first weeks, as if suspecting her of a desire to give less than was their due in return for that magnificent emolument, her salary. She heaped continually more tasks upon her, tasks of cooking, of needlework, and housework, as well as the one for which she had originally engaged her. Ursula worked like a little slave. She never had an idle moment. "Never let me catch you with your hands idle," Madame Garroni had told her; "there is always sewing to be done." The children's presence with her at night, their occasional fits of crying and fretful wakefulness, which compelled her to get up and soothe them until they fell asleep again, made Ursula's present life much harder even than the one she had left. And the summer climate of Rome—often trying to those reared in more bracing air—told upon her health and energy. She began to feel languid and nervous. She worked hard, and received insufficient food and no leisure at all. Madame Garroni snubbed and scolded her. She was always in the wrong. Her old training had taught her to be silent under reproof, and she offered no excuses when she was found fault with. She learned, though this was harder, to repress her tears. Mario was the only person who treated her like a human being, but he was not often there, and lately he had been too busy to come and join her on the Pincio or in the Borghese Gardens. Ursula was even thankful for this; she was sure that had the fact of his doing so been discovered Madame Garroni would have been extremely displeased. His unfailing kindness when they did meet touched her

heart. She knew that he was kind to her for a purpose, he had almost made that clear to her, but nevertheless she was grateful to him. She had also won the affections of little Alda and Rosina, especially of the former, who turned to her now rather than to her capricious uncertain-tempered mother. Ursula was always gentle and kind to them. She loved them both, and they filled an empty place in her heart.

June had nearly come to an end. Ursula already felt the heat a good deal, though Madame Garroni laughingly assured her that there was worse to follow. It was St. Peter's day, and at luncheon Mario observed suddenly:

"I have borrowed a car this afternoon. If you have no objection I will take Miss Finch and the children out for an hour or two. We can look in at St. Peter's—it will be *en fête* to-day. You must not miss our great Roman *festa,*" he added, turning to Ursula.

Ursula felt certain that Madame Garroni would refuse. She would be annoyed perhaps because she had not been included in the invitation.

"I suppose I must let them go, Mario," she said, "but if there is a great crowd in St. Peter's I do beg you not to take the children in, I am so afraid of their catching things."

Mario laughed. He knew there would be a crowd, and equally he knew that, crowd or no crowd, he intended to take the children into the basilica. But his primary object in going was to take Ursula. She had never been there, indeed she had never any leisure for sight-seeing, and he had a great wish to show it to her to-day. The bronze statue would, he knew, be arrayed in its marvelous cinque-cento vestments, the splendid pastoral ring would adorn those sculptured hands. There would be a queue

of people of all nations and ranks and professions, pressing forward to kiss the foot that was slightly extended to receive the homage of those fresh thousands upon its worn surface. Over the great middle door of the basilica there would hang the Fisherman's net, fashioned of evergreens and shaped like a basket, suspended above the heads of all those who passed in. He wanted to see what impression all this would make upon Ursula. Some people felt a little overwhelmed on first entering upon those vast pale marble spaces, with, far off, the glimmer of a hundred orange lamps shining like flowers around the Confession. It was all so immense, built indeed to welcome countless pilgrims from every part of the world. He wanted her to feel the extraordinary unity of the Catholic Church, with its appeal that touched alike the learned and the simple, the old and the young, the rich and the poor.

He was glad that his aunt had made so little demur.

"You may take my children as sight-seers," said Guido, in rather a savage tone, "but I am not going to let them kiss St. Peter's foot or any rubbish of that sort."

"Miss Finch will see to that; she has no sympathy, I am sure, for the custom of worshipping graven images which prevails here," said Madame Garroni acidly.

She glanced sharply at Ursula, whose face was very pale and immobile.

"I wish you would not be so absurd, Uncle Guido," said Mario, with a touch of irritability. "Why should your children not do what all the little Roman children do? They will be there in hundreds to-day with their parents."

"They are my children," said Garroni violently. "I have a right to say what they shall do and what

they shall not do. I will allow no one to interfere, least of all a priest-ridden person like yourself!" He banged his fist down on the table.

Mario went on eating. But the storm he had raised was not destined to be easily pacified.

"If I find that you are trying to teach my children religion I shall ask you to go away. I will not have it—I will not!" His eyes almost started out of his head with rage.

Ursula understood very little of what was being said, but she saw that Garroni had lost all control of his temper, and that his anger was directed against Mario. The heated altercation continued, and presently old Signora Garroni joined in and spoke to her son in a loud reproachful voice. Alda who was always nervous began first to whimper and then to cry. Her father spoke sharply to her, and Madame Garroni leaned forward and gave her a shake, saying: "If you make that noise Miss Finch will take you away and put you to bed."

Mario's replies sounded cool and temperate, but there was sarcasm and even contempt in his voice which only served to increase his uncle's anger. Finally Garroni sprang up from his seat and made a rush at his nephew. Ursula was filled with consternation. She thought the two men were going to fight. She put her arm protectingly round little Alda, who was watching the proceedings with terrified eyes.

Mario rose, too, his dark eyes flashing. He turned to Ursula, murmured an apology, and went out of the room.

"He is an insolent, ill-bred young fool," said Garroni. "I will not have him interfering here. It is all your doing, I know," he added, turning furiously to his mother. "I know you are encouraging him all the time. You have brought him up to be as foolish as yourself."

The old woman said nothing. She fixed her eyes upon Ursula with a long, steady gaze that made the girl feel guilty and uncomfortable. She thought to herself: "Has Mario told her anything? If Madame Garroni suspects anything she will send me away." Ursula began to feel that her position was becoming perilous. For, of course, if they discovered that Mario had been talking to her, had been trying to convert her, they would send her away. She was here because she was a Protestant, and could be relied upon not to teach the children anything of the Catholic religion. Yet Garroni's attitude alarmed her. It was the attitude of a man who fanatically hated religion, and whose life was spent in combating its influence. There was something evil about his fanaticism, as of one who was fighting against God. It was not the narrow and bigoted intolerance to which she had been accustomed at Pentarn, it was a much larger, much fiercer thing. She could not place herself on his side. She saw suddenly that she would prefer to lend her support to Mario rather than to his uncle. And it was this knowledge that taught her how perilous her position had become. They would send her away, turn her out into the street, and she would have no place, no friends to go to; she would be alone and penniless in Rome.

"You can take the children away, Miss Finch," said Madame Garroni, who felt slightly ashamed that Ursula should have witnessed one of her husband's violent outbursts of temper. Mario ought to have known better than to mention the subject of religion to him. It always produced a scene of the kind.

Punctually at the time appointed, Mario appeared in the car he had borrowed for the afternoon. First he drove up to the Janiculum so that Ursula might see that beautiful panoramic view of Rome, so fa-

miliar to all tourists. Then they descended the hill and approached St. Peter's along the Borgo San Spirito. They came suddenly into the great piazza, which was thronged with an immense concourse of people, all wending their way across it toward the steps that led up to the great basilica. No feast is so dear to the hearts of the Roman people as this one; it seems peculiarly their own, and few citizens omit a visit to the great church on St. Peter's day. Ursula felt as if the building must be inadequate to contain such a great multitude of pilgrims, all bent on doing homage to the Prince of the apostles. The wide pale expanse with Bernini's long graceful colonnades, holding out as it were their arms to enclose the thronging crowds, was a beautiful sight to-day when all Rome seemed to be participating in the wonderful *festa*. The splendid fountains of Maderna flung up dazzling sheets of spray that shone gold and silver in the burning sunlight. The sky made a dark blue canopy overhead, unbroken by any cloud.

Mario pointed out the Fisherman's net to Ursula as they passed into the portico. They had to wait a little time until the crowds in front of them had pushed their way through the inner doors. Mario lifted little Rosina in his arms, fearing that she might be crushed. Ursula held Alda tightly by the hand. At last they found themselves within the vast pale spaces of the basilica, and a sudden rush of cool air touched their faces. How immense it was! So immense that the enormous crowds seemed almost lost in it. It was only when they approached the statue, arrayed in its marvelous cinque-cento vestments that they found it difficult to proceed. Whole families were passing the ancient bronze figure, kissing the worn foot, and lifting up their children to do the same. Two *carabinieri* stood one on each side of

the statue, keeping a vigilant watch upon the jewels with which it was adorned.

Mario set little Rosina down by the side of Ursula and took his place in the queue. When his turn came Ursula could see that he first touched the foot with his lips and then bending his head touched it also with his forehead. Presently he came back and joined her.

"You see I have respected my uncle's wishes," he said to her; "but it is only because I know that he will question the children when they get home, and perhaps he might punish them for disobedience. Will you come over here, Miss Finch? It is almost time for Vespers to begin, and I want you to see the Cardinal come in."

They stood side by side for a few minutes, and then the procession emerged from the sacristy. The Cardinal Arch-priest, arrayed in gala scarlet, was a majestic and princely figure as he walked slowly toward his throne, with an immobile face and downcast eyes. He was accompanied by numerous ecclesiastics.

Ursula had never seen a function of the kind before, and against her will it impressed her.

Vespers was sung, and all through the chanting of the psalms the thousands of feet treading the marble floor made a continuous accompaniment of sound, crisp, surging, like the ebb and flow of waves upon the shingle.

"Now you will hear *'O Roma Felix'* sung," whispered Mario. "It is the most wonderful thing of all. People come here just to hear it."

The choir sang exquisitely the ancient, beautiful melody:

O Roma felix, quae duorum Principum
Es consecrata glorioso sanguine:
Horum cruore purpurata ceteras
Excellis orbis una pulchritudines.

Once she looked up sharply at Mario and saw that his eyes were bright with tears. Not a few of those around her exhibited the same emotion. And although she did not understand it perfectly she felt strangely touched. The words echoed in her ears, reiterated by the exquisite singing of the choir: *"O Roma felix. . . . O Roma felix—"*

Mario made a sign to her to follow him. He led the way back and stopped before the Confession of St. Peter. The glow of innumerable lamps made a patch of flame-covered light, subdued, yet glowing steadily. Mario knelt down there and, hiding his face, prayed. Ursula felt certain that he was praying for the children, perhaps even for herself. Moved by a sudden impulse she knelt down by his side. The solemnity of the hour possessed her. *"O Roma felix. . . . O Roma felix—"* She looked up, and high above her head she read those tremendous words written in enormous letters around the Dome: *Tu es Petrus, et super hanc Petram aedificabo Ecclesiam Meam.* There was no mistaking their vital and eternal import. They came down to her then across the ages like a clarion sound. She looked around her. Yes, almost every one present there to-day believed in the divine mission of the Roman Catholic Church. It was past the tourist season, and few foreigners cared to remain so late in Rome. Most of those present were Italians with a sprinkling of devout pilgrims from other nations. They had come to pray beside the Confession, to kiss the worn foot, but above all to show their profound and living faith in those eternal truths which the Church, under the Vicar of Christ, guards and preserves still across nearly two thousand years. What need had Rome to show her credentials? She had only to point to those words: *Thou art Peter, and upon this Rock I will build My Church.* And was not

this the Rock, standing on the very site where the Prince of the apostles went forth to his martyrdom, drenching the soil with his blood?

Her face was very white as she followed Mario out of the basilica, and as she went a thousand voices seemed to pursue her. "Thou art Peter, and upon this Rock I will build My Church." *O Roma felix. O Roma felix.*

"I am afraid you have been standing too long," said Mario, with sudden compunction.

"Oh, no," said Ursula, "I did not find it too long."

Her eyes looked past him with a very strange expression.

"What have I done? Have I offended her?" thought Mario. "She looks so strange."

On the way home she sat at the back of the car with little Alda, and she did not exchange a single word with Mario. At the door he sprang out first and gave her his hand, and then lifted Alda out. He was still puzzled at Ursula's silence. Its true meaning had not dawned upon him.

"I want to thank you," she said suddenly; "you have given me a great pleasure. I do not know quite how to thank you enough."

She hurried away, the children following her. Mario drove off, more puzzled than ever.

CHAPTER XVII

As the summer wore on the heat in Rome became very great. All day long the wooden shutters were fastened across the windows, and the rooms were filled with an airless darkness that was scarcely less hot than the fiery conditions that prevailed without. To the sojourners from northern lands there is something very trying in this custom to which the Romans have adhered through generations. Air, even hot air, seems preferable to no air at all. Ursula felt that she should never grow used to this suffocating gloom which continued all day until the evening, when the windows were once more opened to admit the delicious breeze that blew in from the sea, refreshing the parched city. But after many seasons spent there the foreigner yields himself to custom, and finds it to be the only tolerable one when the sun enters Leone, and, as the Arabs say, becomes indeed a lion in his strength and power.

Other little changes crept in, varying the lives of the Garroni family. The hour of siesta was rigorously observed. Ursula was permitted to lie down and rest between the hours of half-past one and three. The children slept on till four o'clock, when they had tea so as to be ready for the evening walk at five o'clock. They were often feverish and fretful; it was difficult to amuse them. Ursula herself grew pale and thin. She had grown up in the bleak and bracing air of North Cornwall, and she suffered very much during those hours of fierce, suffocating heat. As a rule the nights were fairly cool, especially after one o'clock in the morning. She often lay awake until that early coolness set in, trying to school herself into immobility for fear of awakening the children with her restlessness. She was glad to

get up at six o'clock for then the air was delicious, so rarefied and invigorating that it possessed almost a mountain quality. It refreshed her, and gave her courage to face the weary burning day that lay in front of her. She would have been happy in such a climate if she could have been quite idle. But Madame Garroni, growing more stout and indolent than ever during the summer months, did not even attempt to spare her.

"What a fuss you make about a little work!" she used to say, flinging out two fat white hands with a gesture of contempt. "Now, when I was your age I was never happy unless I had plenty to do."

Ursula who had made no fuss at all went back into her shell of silence. She was in despair. Would this life of hers continue thus forever? Would there never, never be release?

Mario had gone away; he wrote from cool places in the mountains of the north. Meantime it grew hotter in Rome. By local tradition St. Laurence's day—the tenth of August—is supposed to be the hottest of the year, when, the Romans say, you may even find red-hot cinders from the Saint's gridiron in the streets. The rain will come between the two Madonnas, say the people confidently; that is, between her Assumption, on the fifteenth of August, and her Nativity on the eighth of September. Seldom indeed, does the much-desired rain fail to fall between those two dates, as if it were part of the bounty of the beloved Mother of God, who is so honored in the churches of Rome.

Ursula suffered blindly that summer. Anna took her departure early in August, and Madame Garroni made no attempt to replace her. It would hardly be worth while to do so, she explained, since in all probability they would have to take the children to the seaside very soon, and, in the meantime, Ursula

could very well spare the time to help in the kitchen. Beneath this fresh task she very nearly broke down. Fortunately in the midst of those days of fiery heat, brazen skies, and glaring pavements that scorched the eyes and blistered the feet, little Alda had a slight attack of fever. Garroni becoming alarmed formed plans for removing his household to the sea without delay. Hitherto, he had protested against the idea, saying that he could not possibly afford the expense. But Mrs. Burton had already been appealed to, and had replied with a handsome check.

"But, of course, I shan't take that girl," Madame Garroni informed her husband; "your mother will help me to look after the children."

"Will she stay here alone?" inquired Garroni.

"She will do whatever she is told. You will come with us of course, and she can sleep here and look after the flat, and get her meals at a *latteria*."

When everything had been satisfactorily arranged these plans were disclosed to Ursula. She accepted the news almost thankfully. She was to be alone—altogether alone—for the first time in her life. She would have time to sleep. For several weeks she would enjoy such freedom as she had never dreamed of. The conditions in no way appalled her, although Madame Garroni was not inclined to be generous.

"I shall give you a lira a day for your board," she told her. "Anything beyond that you must find out of your own pocket."

She omitted, or perhaps forgot, to make any advance payment of this magnificent addition to Ursula's salary before she departed with her family to Lerici. Alda shed a few tears when she discovered that Ursula was to be left behind, but Rosina was far too much excited at the thought of the journey to care for such a trifle as that.

For the first few days after they had gone Ursula

enjoyed her liberty as she had never enjoyed anything in her life before. She could lie in bed as late as she liked, only going into the kitchen at an early hour to heat some coffee and prepare her breakfast. She went, as Madame Garroni had suggested, to a *latteria* for her other meals. But cheap as they were, and modest as were the repasts she chose, she soon found that a lira a day was utterly insufficient to cover their cost. Ursula had loyally sent home each month the greater part of her salary, much more indeed than she could prudently spare, and she had only set aside a few lire for her own personal expenses to be used in any untoward emergency. She was loath to touch that poor little nest egg, nevertheless after the first week it became absolutely necessary to do so. Her salary was now due, but Madame Garroni showed no signs of remembering to send it. Ursula did not dare to remind her of it. But this fact left her now almost penniless, except for that poor little sum she had put by. The consequence was that she soon began to grow weak from insufficient and improper nourishment. Her head felt very light and her limbs very heavy. One evening she found herself altogether too weak to climb down all those weary stairs, and seek the *latteria,* which was not far away. She drank some coffee, and ate a little piece of dry bread, which seemed to choke her. She had a great longing for some cooling drink with ice in it.

Feeling exhausted she went to lie down on her bed. Perhaps a little sleep would refresh her. Outside a scorching sirocco was blowing through the city, raising perfect whirlwinds of dust that blew in through the crevices of the shutters.

Ursula lay on her back staring up at the ceiling. The thought of being ill here quite alone preyed a little on her mind, it made her feel actually afraid.

Three more weeks at least must elapse before the Garroni family returned. For a week she had spoken to no one, except to the porter's ancient wife, who lived in the subterranean regions of the house. A dreadful sense of desolation came over her. She began to cry from sheer weakness. Gradually her sobbing mastered her. She wept violently, until her head ached and her eyes burned as if their sockets were full of fire.

This nervous breakdown would have evoked no surprise in any doctor's mind. The only wonder was that Ursula, an untried girl, could so long have endured the sharp strain to which she had been subjected. Indeed, the beginnings of the attack might usefully have been traced back to the perpetual overwork, the daily physical fatigue of her life at Pentarn. Without any intervening period of repose she had been thrust into this new life, which, from every point of view, she found exceedingly trying. She had, indeed, worked as she had never worked before, in a climate that even idle people found sufficiently trying in summer; her nights had been broken by the fretful wakefulness of Alda, and latterly she had been forced to do all the cooking and washing up for a household of six persons. Now the sudden solitude, the pecuniary anxiety and lack of proper food had filled to the brim her cup of suffering and had precipitated the crisis.

When morning came she was still too weak to go further than the front door, whence she was able to call the porter's wife, a kindly old soul, who promised to bring her milk and bread. Ursula drank some milk, but she could eat nothing. She crept thankfully back to bed. Her mouth and throat were parched with fever, and her eyes stared out of her face with a dreadful brilliance.

For some days Ursula was very ill indeed. She

felt mortally ill, and wondered if she were going to die, quite alone like this, without anyone near her. It had all been a disaster, her leaving Pentarn, her coming among these strangers, who were not even kind to her. When it was over she never knew how she had emerged from that fierce combat which had possessed, as she was well aware, mental and spiritual, as well as physical, elements. Youth conquered, and then she had never lived softly; all her past training had taught her patience and self-discipline. In the whole twenty-two and a half years of her life she could hardly have looked back upon a single hour of indolence, of physical ease. Sleep, hardly won and abundantly merited, had always been haunted by dreams of the formidable array of tomorrow's tasks. Daphne—it was odd how Daphne flitted before her vision during those nights of nervous fever in Rome. A brilliant triumphant Daphne, wearing cool, delicious raiment. A Daphne, who perhaps was even now engaged to Humphrey Willmot.

That thought brought no pain now across her numbed senses. She was too desolate to care. Humphrey was something beautiful and tender who had vanished out of her life forever. She was alone, abandoned—what had she to do with the Humphrey Willmots of this world? She was a slave, called by courtesy a nursery-governess. And they had left her here alone without money, to starve, perhaps to die. She had five lire left. Even if she had been well enough to write and tell Madame Garroni of her present predicament she doubted if she would have sent her any money.

One night between sleeping and waking she had one of those curious experiences which seem to have no explanation in the rational world. She was walking, so she thought, in one of the narrow streets of

Rome beyond the Fountain of Trevi, when she suddenly stopped before a little shrine of Our Lady set into the wall of a corner house. It was a picture of the Madonna and Child, and was glazed so that it was not very distinct. An iron grille guarded it, and on the ledge in front of it there was a little bunch of fading flowers. It was considerably above the level of the pavement, and she wondered how the flowers had come there. Perhaps some one had lifted a child up to put them on the little ledge. But the Madonna was not looking at the flowers. Her wise, pitying, sorrowful eyes were fixed upon Ursula. She seemed to be beckoning to her, to be calling to her, with those calm, courageous, tender eyes. It was as if she were saying, though Ursula heard no words: "You can never know anything that I have not known. I have suffered and lost more than any woman who ever lived. I, too, have been left alone and desolate. But if you come to me I will teach you what these things mean. I will show you, too, that suffering is the gift of God, and not the least of all His gifts to man. He has set His divine seal upon it, the precious blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ."

Ursula started violently, and awoke to full consciousness. What words were these to pierce across her fever-stricken senses? She looked wildly round the room. The cold silver dawn of the south was rapidly delineating the ugly furniture, the two empty white cribs that belonged to Alda and Rosina. She had left the window and the wooden shutters wide open before going to bed last night. The room was in disorder. There were things lying on the chairs and on the two little beds. Her shoes were scattered on the floor. She had not tried to put anything away, and for several days the room had not been touched. She was her own servant, and she

had felt too ill to cope with it all. Now that she was awake she was aware that despite her physical malaise and the light-headedness that seemed to have become an almost chronic symptom with her, she felt extraordinarily refreshed and sustained. The vision—if vision it were—had consoled her. She remembered the shrine quite well, she had often passed it in her walks. She had even stopped before it once to admire the old painting, to notice the calm, heroic patient face of the Madonna looking down upon the quiet narrow little Roman street. The impression thus made upon her brain must have been a far deeper one than she had imagined, to produce such a peculiarly vivid dream. What were those words? *"I will show you, too, that suffering is the gift of God, and not the least of all His gifts to man."* Ursula, utterly unversed in Catholic theology, had never either heard or read such words as these. But they seemed to give a new meaning to life, illuminating it like a powerful searchlight. They sounded like a clarion cry, summoning her to emerge from the black, brooding, perilous darkness of despair.

"Yes, I am better to-day," she told the porter's wife, as she took the bottle of milk and the loaf of bread from her hands. "I shall perhaps be able to go out later." She spoke in halting Italian.

The old woman shook her head. "But the signorina ought not to go out. She is *molto ammalata* —very ill indeed."

Ursula smiled. "I am better. I shall soon be quite well."

She shut the door and tottered back to her room. Even this little effort had fatigued her and made her pulses beat uncomfortably. And she used to be so strong! At Pentarn she had never been actually ill. She had never for a single day failed to accom-

plish her tasks, to fulfill her tale of bricks. She had never been caught up into the arbitrary repose of illness. Ursula, unused to the common symptoms of fever, had perhaps imagined herself to be more gravely ill than she really was. Now she longed to emerge from what seemed to her an almost criminal indolence, and yet she could hardly walk across the room without an exhaustion that produced the sensations of approaching unconsciousness. She went back to bed, too weak to struggle. For five days longer she remained there, untended except for the kindly ministrations of the porter's wife.

The scorching day dedicated to St. Laurence was past. His relics—the piece of chain, the fragment of gridiron—had been exposed for the veneration of the faithful in the church of St. Lorenzo, in Lucina, that has been for ever made famous to English readers because it was the scene of Pompilia's wedding in the *Ring and the Book*. The feast of the Assumption was over; spent were the bonfires lit upon the Umbrian hills by the pious peasants in honor of Our Lady. A deadly sirocco held the city and the Roman Campagna in its grip, withering and scorching the flowers and trees. The thirsty, parched world lay panting and exhausted, waiting for the rain. When it came at last it was no gentle shower, but it poured from black skies in sheets of hail. The loud booming of the thunder rent the air like fierce artillery. Lightning split the clouds with fiery forked tongues. It was a storm to strike terror even to the hearts of a people inured to storms and earthquakes and the violence of nature.

Ursula lay in bed trembling at every fresh crash. She had closed the wooden shutters, but already the air that blew through their chinks was fragrant with the odor of rain falling upon the earth—the scent seemed to her to arise like incense in grati-

tude for the welcome gift. When the storm had ceased and rain was falling with a straight, heavy steadiness, she rose, and, going to the window, unfastened the shutters and looked out. Little rivers, brown and discolored, raced down the deserted streets. From every roof showers of drops fell upon the pavement. Not a solitary human figure was visible. Every one had sought refuge from the storm.

Above the house the black clouds had parted a little, showing distant pools of clear blue that looked very bright and pure.

The cooler weather was not only temporary; it continued for some days. The storm was renewed, only with lesser violence, each succeeding afternoon. One evening when the sky had cleared and the streets were still wet with rain, Ursula summoned all her courage, dressed herself, and went out. The fresh damp air was delicious; it restored and invigorated her. She still felt giddy and rather lightheaded, and when she began to walk her legs felt unsolid, as if they had been made of cotton-wool. Nevertheless, she was aware to-day, for the first time, of a distinct renewal of strength within her.

At the end of the street Ursula crossed a piazza and walked slowly in a northernly direction. Presently she came to a church, one of the many dedicated to Our Lady. It was a small round church, not much frequented, belonging to a religious order. When the early Masses were over it was generally closed all day until an hour or so before sunset. Ursula was feeling rather exhausted by the time she came to it, and, seeing the door open, it suddenly occurred to her that she would go in and rest. She climbed the steps, pushed aside the heavy leathern curtain that hung before the door, and entered the building. It was rather dark, but in the thick in-

cense-laden gloom the lamps shone with a piercing brightness.

On the right there was an altar dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary. Above it hung a copy of Sassoferrato's famous picture in Santa Sabina. The Madonna is portrayed with the Divine Infant in her arms, and she is handing the rosary to St. Dominic. Ursula saw that a woman—a shabby figure dressed in black—was kneeling before it. She went forward and, moved by some impulse she was never able to explain, she knelt down by the woman's side.

She did not pray, although her exterior attitude was one of devotion. She hid her face in her hands. An indescribable peace came over her. She did not try to resist the impression now made upon her by the atmosphere of the little church. Even the rather tawdry decorations, the gilt flowers, the artificial pink roses, scarcely disturbed her. She was thinking of that curiously vivid dream or vision, that had come to her that night when she had been plunged in the darkest depths of despondency. She remembered very clearly those words of hope. Without them she thought she must have died, so tragic and hopeless had life become to her.

A light noise aroused her. A priest in a Dominican habit emerged from the sacristy. He was an elderly man with a thin dark face and piercing black eyes. As he passed before the high altar he genuflected, then he knelt down for a moment's prayer, and went into one of the confessionals. Almost immediately the woman rose too, and knelt down on the step at the side of the confessional, lifting her face to the grating.

It was certainly the first time that Ursula Finch had ever seen a penitent enter a confessional. It gave her a little shock, as of something novel and strange, and perhaps to English prejudice a little

sinister. It outraged something within her that belonged very intimately to Pentarn, and was the result of her upbringing and education. Her father's views on confession had been very clear indeed. He was accustomed to pronounce them aloud when any discussion on the subject arose in the *High Church Gazette* or other organ of the ritualistic party. He had no patience at all with those of his High Church brethren who went so far as to inculcate Romish doctrines and "errors." Auricular confession was to him anathema, and he was fond of stigmatizing it as unwholesome. What would he say if he could see Ursula now? She felt guilty and frightened, but strongly and passionately interested. Reminiscences of *Villette* and of the actual incident upon which the episode therein was based, as related by Charlotte Brontë in a letter to her sister Emily, came back to Ursula's mind. She herself was alone and ill and suffering, in a foreign city, just as Charlotte Brontë had been in Brussels. And Charlotte had sought relief from her intolerable solitude and misery in the confessional. She had, according to her own showing in that poignant letter, spoken to no one for many days. She must have known precisely this feeling of desolate, hopeless abandonment which had companioned Ursula for so long. But with Charlotte the episode had come to an abrupt ending. She had never followed it up, never sought out the priest for subsequent instruction. Some of her finest rhetoric had been employed indeed to attack the Catholic Church. More than one finely written passage of the kind recurred to Ursula's mind then. Yet, though Charlotte Brontë had made her hero a devout, and in some ways, a bigoted, Catholic, Haworth and all that it stood for had ultimately triumphed. She had put out a timid hand and then had drawn back in alarm.

She had even used her great gift to attack the Church that had given her comfort and consolation in a dark hour.

At that moment the woman's whispering ceased, and the deeper voice of the priest was faintly heard in the silence of the church. He was uttering, although Ursula did not know it, the words of absolution that dismiss the penitent, shriven, at peace, reconciled once more to Almighty God. The woman emerged and moved away to a chair nearer the high altar. She knelt down, immersed in prayer. Before she perfectly realized all that her action involved Ursula had risen, too, and had taken her place in the dark shadows of the confessional. Her heart was beating wildly; she could hardly speak.

The priest murmured some Latin words, then he said in Italian:

"How long is it since your last confession?"

"Can you speak English?" she said desperately. "I am English."

Through the pierced brass grating she could not distinguish the priest's face, but she felt rather than saw that it was turned toward her attentively.

"Yes, my child," he answered in English.

She had no need of courage then. Something stronger than herself seemed to take possession of her. She explained her position, that she was a Protestant, that she had just been very ill, that she was alone in Rome and suffering, and in need of a kindly word to prevent her from sinking once more into that abyss of despair.

"Since you are a Protestant," he said at last, when she paused, "you cannot, alas, receive absolution. But if you wish me to advise you I can do so. You seem to be in need of a doctor more than a priest," he added. His voice was low and kindly, was indeed as music in her ears.

"Oh, must I be shut out?" There was agony in her cry.

"My child, the door is always open. If you really wish to be a Catholic, to receive the sacraments which the Catholic Church alone can give you, I can, of course, arrange for you to be instructed. Perhaps you will come with me now for a few minutes into the sacristy."

Ursula followed him, almost as if she were in some strange dream. But even so, she knew that all Pentarn was fighting for her now. All that she knew, that she had ever been taught by her father, both in church and at home. In a sense, too, she was perfectly aware that this mood of hers, with its passionate craving for the consolations of the Catholic Church, was not a normal one. It would, therefore, in all probability prove quite transitory. When she was well and strong again would she not be able to look back upon the episode with the self-scorn, almost the shame, with which Charlotte Brontë had afterward regarded her own similar experience? Yes, shame at yielding to a passing weakness. Charlotte, however, had been governed by M. Heger's dominating personality, by the power of his influence, when she entered the confessional at St. Gudule's. But Ursula had no such excuse as that to offer. She was quite free from human influence of the kind. She had listened, it is true, with interest, and even pleasure when Mario had talked to her on the subject of religion, although even then she had been aware of a slight scruple. She had known, too, that he was trying to convert her, for a purpose of his own. She had always, therefore, kept an open mind when listening to his discourses.

Nor could she attribute her present action to the influence of Humphrey. Yet it was he and not

Mario who had first spoken to her of the beauty and holiness of the Catholic Church, although he did not even belong to it. But everything that she had endured of late had brought her step by step to her present pass. Looking back upon those last weeks at Pentarn and the numbing grief she had felt when they had so coldly and deliberately banished her, she was able to realize that she had most truly loved Humphrey Willmot. When they sent her away she had felt like a child, betrayed by the surreptitious removal of a favorite toy. For a time the whole world had seemed dark with loss. She had long ago guessed that she had been sent away on Daphne's account. They had not scrupled to hurt her; they had used their unquestionable power to get rid of her. And so they had lost all right to dictate to her. They must not complain if she now used her liberty as seemed best for her own soul. She had lost Humphrey, and she had done her best to forget him; she had nearly died, and they had not known it, they had known nothing indeed of the extremity of her bitter need.

These thoughts passed rapidly through her mind, crystallizing her resolve. She threw back her head, and her face grew a little hard with determination.

"I—I should like to be instructed," she said; "I am very, very ignorant." She was thinking to herself: "I shall never get such a chance as this again. When they come back I shall have to work harder than ever because they will think I have been so idle all these weeks."

The priest gave her some directions. She was to come again on the following day, about the same hour, and he would give her an introduction to an English nun in a convent not far away. She would teach her all that was necessary for her to know. In

the meantime she must take care of her health—strangers often found that season of the year unhealthy in Rome. His words were kind and fatherly. Then he disappeared for a few minutes and returned, bringing some books. To her surprise they were in English.

"Yes, English people come to us sometimes, they prefer in the first instance not to seek out an English priest through the mistaken idea that they might be talked about. I suppose they think also that here they are less likely to be observed by their own countrymen. Some of us," and he smiled, "still like to seek Our Lord as Nicodemus did, at night!"

Ursula went away with the books. She thought to herself: "Of course, I don't mean to go back or to see the nun. I don't really mean to be a Catholic. I mustn't let myself be influenced by a dream—that would be absurd. It's because I'm ill—I'm not myself. I ought never to have gone into that church and talked to that priest. Luckily he doesn't know who I am; I'm never likely to see him again, so there's no harm done."

She went back to the flat, and all the evening she struggled against the sense of having been enchained. Not her body—that was free enough—but her soul. It was as if it had been captured by that fierce overmastering force that had driven her into the confessional, a force against which she was utterly powerless. It had nothing to do with the priest; he had not argued with her at all. It had something perhaps to do with her dream of the Madonna. But, in any case, it held her, it would not let her go. She struggled, as indeed the human heart nearly always struggles, against the first direct infusion of divine grace. It rebels against the thought of that sweet prisoning from which it shall no more escape, except by ways too dark and evil

to be contemplated. Ursula struggled, and then suddenly she had no wish to combat it any more. She sank down as it were into that ocean of spiritual light and love that was waiting to receive her.

> Still live in me this loving strife,
> Of living death and dying life;
> For while Thou sweetly slayest me,
> Dead to myself, I live in Thee. . . . .

CHAPTER XVIII

URSULA was invited to spend a few days in the convent after presenting herself there, with the letter of introduction she had received from the Dominican priest. The Reverend Mother could not refuse hospitality to this solitary waif who was timidly knocking at the door of the Church, uncertain as yet whether she really craved admittance or not.

Her life in the convent was a great contrast to the one she had led in the Garronis' flat. She had nothing to do now except to think, to pray and to rest. Her tired, exhausted body needed just those things to restore it to its old equilibrium.

The place was scrupulously clean; her room, though small, was light and airy, and the hours were so regular that everything moved with clockwork punctuality. The day began with Mass in the nuns' chapel at seven o'clock, and after the first day or two Ursula was able to attend it regularly. Throughout the day there was exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, and two nuns were always kneeling there in adoration before their Master. Every half hour the guard was changed and two others came in to relieve the watchers. With their white veils and black habits, they looked as motionless as statues, as they knelt there with bowed heads. It was a simple and regular routine of worship and work.

Every day Ursula received two short instructions from Mother Lucia, the nun to whom she had been introduced by the Dominican. In the intervals she read many spiritual books, and also spent much time praying in the chapel. As she grew stronger she was able to go for walks through the gay and crowded streets of Rome, visiting in this way many

important churches. She was happy, and for the first time in her life she enjoyed rest and leisure. The atmosphere of the convent—one of love and charity—soothed her tired mind and body.

She concealed nothing of her history from Mother Lucia. She told her story simply, the circumstances of her coming to Italy, of her unhappiness with the Garroni family, of all that Mario had informed her concerning the children. Quite evidently she did not in the least realize the importance, from a Catholic point of view, of what she was saying. That Garroni was a Freemason who would not permit his children to be baptized by a priest, and whose wife, a Protestant, was absolutely antagonistic to the Catholic Church, revealed to Mother Lucia a state of things, alas, not too uncommon, but which aroused a sense of horror within her which she saw that Ursula was very far from sharing.

It was difficult for Ursula to explain why she had gone into the confessional and asked help of a strange priest. Perhaps no convert is ever able to give an exact reason for the first definite step he made on the "road to Rome." Ursula was, indeed, so curiously ignorant that Mother Lucia wondered why she had ever followed up that first step. But she was touched by the girl's loneliness, her obvious fragility, that was evidently the result of a sharp attack of illness, as well as by the fact that she was so completely stranded in Rome; and she knew that if nothing more came of Ursula's visit she would at least have held out a helping hand to a fellow-countrywoman in distress. It was, indeed, as a soul in great need that Ursula appealed to her.

Ursula herself still felt like a person in a dream. That she should find herself here in the convent at all, was wont to perplex and bewilder her when she began to realize it. But she was no longer friendless,

that was the great thing. When she looked at Mother Lucia's beautiful calm face, framed in its white coif and black veil, she had a sense of security, a feeling that the affection she gave her was an enduring one because it was inspired and sanctified by the great love of God that burned in her heart. The thought gave her courage. She did not even stop to ask herself what Madame Garroni would say when she discovered—if she ever did—that she had passed part of her holiday in a convent. Ursula had almost reached the point of resolving never to be afraid of any human being again. The conscious liberty of the individual with its gift of free-will had awakened within her. She had a right to shape her own life, and instinctively she was aware that Mother Lucia would help and guide her to a right shaping.

Sometimes, indeed, she still had the feeling that she was being moved by some arbitrary and perhaps capricious force that assigned small importance to any choice or predilection of her own. She was, in a sense, being led by the hand. And although she had no very definite wish to become a Catholic—she was still too ignorant of all the Church had to offer for that—she had, as many converts have, a very strong feeling that to become one was required of her. Ursula was physically too weak for any energetic rebellion such as so many display against a call that seems to them capricious rather than divine. She followed the line of least resistance, obeying Mother Lucia in all the little details of her daily life, going step by step painfully, gropingly, toward a goal that was neither wholly desired nor undesired by her. It was what she had to do, simply that, and nothing else. As she made progress—and she was very quick to learn—she became obsessed with the conviction that it was what God required of her, for some well-defined spiritual reason that was still

hidden from her. And if it involved sacrifice, such as a complete rupture between herself and Pentarn, a remorseless, permanent cutting of old ties, she was ready to offer that sacrifice. Even Humphrey Willmot, rich, free and independent, had stopped short of taking that step, although she knew that it had allured him. It was no longer any pain to her to think of Humphrey. He had done his work, for it was he who had sown that first seed of her conversion, astonished though he would have been if anyone had accused him of such a feat. He was the first person who had ever in her hearing praised the Catholic Church, and made her face the fact that it was the only Church that had held sway in England before the so-called Reformation, and that from its ranks innumerable saints and martyrs had sprung. Humphrey had openly regretted the Reformation, he had mourned over the violated abandoned shrines with which England is strewn. Then came Mario, speaking with the more assured and certain voice of the man who is Catholic-born. Devout and well-educated in the things of his faith, he had shown her something of the Church as the most powerful living force that exists in the world. Yet, when she looked back she saw that all they had been able to accomplish had amounted to very little. The rest had been her own doing; or could she, indeed, say that it had been her own doing when she had been irresistibly impelled forward by some mighty and invisible power? That sudden recollection of one of the most notable scenes in *Villette* had prompted her to a half-conscious imitation of the woman, struggling like herself against the twin desolations of solitude and sickness. Only it had not ended there with her, as it had ended with Charlotte Brontë and her prototype, Lucy Snowe. She could not have gone away as they did to utter bitter diatribes against

a Church that had offered her its promise of consolation and pardon. Ursula had gone forward, perhaps, because she was of a meeker and more obedient disposition, and also because it was always easier for her to obey a given mandate than to refuse consent. That was why she had gone, almost against her conscience, to see Mother Lucia at the bidding of the Dominican priest. That was why she had come to stay in the convent, and now attended her instructions day by day. She had the feeling too, ever stronger, that by doing these very things she was fulfilling her spiritual destiny. God had asked this thing of her. It was not easy, and when she dared to examine it courageously it even seemed very hard and difficult, and also far-reaching in its consequences, but it was something that she was called upon to do. It scarcely attracted her, but what hard necessary task had ever attracted her? She had learned to accomplish her work in too bitter a school to suffer any illusions about it. And this was one more task to be done. It was too soon to think of praise and blame. The great thing was to get on with it, to finish it. She had a conviction that in taking the step she would receive strength to endure the consequences, however hard they might prove.

"I think now that you are ready to be received," said Mother Lucia about a fortnight later. "I should like you to make a few days' retreat first. Then you can be received before Madame Garroni returns. Afterward there might be some difficulty about your coming here."

The convert's first question is as a rule: "When do you think I shall be ready to be received?" But Ursula had never asked this question, she had never once alluded to the future. She had been very quietly happy, and insensibly, day by day, the little plant of faith had grown and flourished in her heart.

Rome is a fruitful soil for the catechumen to grow up and expand in. He cannot walk many yards, except perhaps in the new quarters of the city, without receiving some reminder of the faith from picture or crucifix or church. He is aware that the very ground upon which he treads was once watered by the blood of martyrs who died for that very faith toward which he is turning his eyes.

Just for a moment she was a little startled by Mother Lucia's speech. It was, of course, the logical outcome of all her actions since that evening when she had strayed into the Dominican church. She was quite certain now that she wished to take the step, and that there was no other course open to her. Perhaps she was intended hereafter to be the humble instrument that was to help to save the faith of the Garroni children. But she was disinclined to think very much about the future. Although it might conceivably hold moments of even greater anguish and suffering than those through which she had passed, she knew that life could never again plunge her into that slough of despond from which she had, with such difficulty, emerged sane and balanced. She had known the Rod and received its sharp stripes in the blind despair of ignorance, but now she was also to know the Staff, to learn to lean upon it and rejoice in its divine support. She had the feeling, common to most converts, that mortal perils and physical suffering would necessarily lose for her something of their terror. *My grace is sufficient for thee.* Wonderful words of strength and consolation!

And then whatever happened she would never be alone in the same way again.

The little ceremony in the nuns' private chapel passed like a dream. An English priest received her abjuration which Ursula read in a low distinct voice. Mother Lucia was by her side, prompting her; she

felt her presence like an encouragement. Behind a grille some nuns were chanting very sweetly. Ursula thought their singing of the *Veni Creator Spiritus* would echo in her ears till the end of her life. But she went through it all quietly and without any apparent emotion. Her confession, her conditional baptism, her absolution formed as it were a complete little sequence in that drama, so old, and yet for each individual soul, how new!

And on the morrow would come to her, as it comes indeed to all Catholics whether converts or not, that crowning reward of faith which sets the seal of Christ's precious blood upon the heart forever. *He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood abideth in Me and I in him.*

CHAPTER XIX

Two days later Ursula was summoned downstairs to one of the parlors, having been told that a visitor was awaiting her. She wondered who it could be, and for a moment had even a horrible little suspicion that it might prove to be Madame Garroni herself. But as she entered the rather bare, neat little room, she discovered to her astonishment that it was no other than Mario Linelli. He looked bewildered and slightly perturbed.

"What are you doing here? You haven't left us, have you?"

His voice sounded reproachful, almost rough.

"No, I came here on a visit. I was ill after Madame Garroni went away. Once I thought I should die."

"You look very well now," said Mario, abruptly.

Truth to tell he had never seen Ursula look so nearly beautiful before. All the strain of severe fatigue had left her face. Her dark eyes were shining brilliantly; her skin, always delicate, was paler since her illness and yet had a more healthy appearance. She had changed, and her face was softer. She looked happier, and immeasurably more at peace.

"How did you find me?" she asked, sitting down in one of the chairs.

"The porter's wife gave me your address, although I must tell you she did it very reluctantly. I have brought two letters for you. They have been lying there for some days." He produced two envelopes from his pocket and handed them to her.

Ursula took them eagerly. One was from her mother; the other was addressed in a writing she

did not at once identify, and yet she knew that she had seen it before. With a little shock she suddenly realized that it was from Humphrey Willmot. How she wished it could have come to cheer her during those tragic days she had spent alone at the flat! Now she did not need any such cheering, and yet it was a pleasure to feel that he had not quite forgotten her. Perhaps, he had only written to inform her of his engagement to Daphne. She had been waiting for that news all the summer. She wondered if it would have the power to hurt her now. She felt so strong, almost invulnerable.

"Will you not tell me why you, a Protestant, should be staying in a convent with Catholic nuns?" he asked, interrupting her thoughts of Humphrey Willmot.

"I am not a Protestant now," she told him in a low voice.

Mario sprang up from his seat. He grew very red. His dark eyes regarded her incredulously.

"I was received the day before yesterday. Mother Lucia has been teaching me ever since I came here." There was something delicious in the quiet simplicity with which she spoke.

"I am glad, so very glad, so very thankful," he told her, taking her hand and holding it in his. "I can hardly realize it." He looked at her. She showed no signs now of that past spiritual struggle. Her face was beautiful in its indescribable serenity. "Have you made your first communion?"

"Yes. Yesterday morning."

So that was the reason. You could not traverse those transcendental experiences, and remain unchanged. Yet how quick the call and the response must both have been!

"I can't imagine what my aunt will say!" he ex-

claimed, "and, of course, if Guido hears of it you'll be turned out of his house, neck and crop!"

"Must they know?" she asked.

"I should certainly advise you to be silent about it just for the present. But you have friends here, I suppose, and if anything happened they could always receive you. And even if you aren't very happy with us I hope you will try to stay a little longer. You can teach poor little Alda and Rosina so much now. You'll be fighting the spirit of evil."

"Yes," she assented. "I've sometimes thought that was the reason why I had to become a Catholic."

"No one forced you, I hope? You wished it, didn't you?"

"I don't think I really wished for it so very much in the beginning. I felt I had to do it—that it would be wrong to disobey, to stand aside. So I made up my mind to learn all I could, and now that I've been received I know how very much I really wanted it all the time. I am glad and so happy. I felt yesterday morning as if I must die of joy." She made this admission almost timidly.

"You are a strange creature, Ursula," he said, calling her by her name for the first time. "But it was brave of you to come so blindly. May God reward you!"

He took her hand in his and kissed it almost reverently. His dark eyes rested upon hers.

"I'm not really brave. I simply had to come," she assured him. It was still the only explanation she was able to give of all those happenings of the last few weeks. Even if it meant in the future total separation from home, parents and kindred, as well as an abrupt summary dismissal from the Garroni family, Ursula knew that no previous and more precise knowledge of these calamities would have induced her to alter her course, by one hair's breadth.

She had responded to the helm, steered by some unseen Hand in whose guidance she had felt a blind infused confidence.

"I came to tell you that they are all coming home to-morrow," said Mario presently; "so you'd better come back this evening and get things a bit straight for them. I'm staying with a friend for a day or two. There'll be no servant to help you at first, but I shall be free at six and then I'll come to help you fix things up a bit."

"Thank you very much," said Ursula; "I'll go up and pack."

So the prison walls were about to close in upon her once more. Youth seemed to cry aloud in futile rebellion against this loss of liberty, but she stifled its voice. Her duty was so clear. To go back to her brick-making, to help Alda and Rosina, to give them such teaching as she was capable of. She saw herself secretly fighting against Madame Garroni's ignorant prejudices, and against Guido Garroni's deliberate and malicious antagonism. All of a sudden she felt weak and helpless. Surely she couldn't be called upon to do real active work for the faith so soon? She was a little child in spiritual things herself, knowing scarcely more than the children whose souls she was to defend. Her heart sank at the prospect. She was unworthy of such a high mission.

"You know I will always give you all the help I can," said Mario, taking up his hat.

"Thank you," said Ursula.

He went away saying to himself: "What a life for a young girl! What a life! How can she endure it? And she's of a different class from Arabella—she's *signorile*."

He felt that he had seen Ursula under an entirely new aspect to-day, and she had seemed to him both beautiful and attractive.

"But, of course, she won't stay," he murmured as he went down the street. "Why should she? She could find a dozen better places to-morrow if she chose to look for them."

She would find a softer job now that she was a Catholic. Many of the noble houses would be glad to receive such a girl as that to educate their children. At home how would she ever succeed even in hearing Mass on Sundays? It was an impossible position for her. Yet he longed for her to stay, not solely on the children's account but also on his own.

Ursula went upstairs to her room after Mario had gone and opened her mother's letter. Mrs. Finch was never a good correspondent, and she always grudged the extra payment for a foreign letter. Nor could she ever find much to say to her second daughter. But this letter was a quite unusually long one.

"I wish you had never gone away," she wrote, "and as it turns out it would have been far better if you had remained at home. Ruth is so slow, she does not get through half what you used to, and Jenny is more idle and stupid than ever. Nicholas got into debt at Oxford, you know how opposed I always was to his going there at all, and your father was so angry that he refused to pay, though I am certain he could have done so if he had chosen. He gave Nicholas five pounds and sent him to Canada. I don't suppose he will do any good there. Still it seems hard that an only son should be treated in this way. Daphne is engaged to Lord Cheam. He is over sixty years old and has been married twice before, but he is very rich. His children are all grown up and married so that they will not be at all in Daphne's way. Mrs. Willmot arranged it all and Daphne is still staying with them in Scotland, and Lord Cheam is there too. I have not seen

Daphne since she went to London in June. She enjoyed it very much, though I think it was a disappointment to her just at first that young Mr. Willmot went away almost at once on a yachting trip to Norway, and I don't believe he has come back yet. However, his mother told her she can never count upon him, and indeed from what we knew of him when he was down here we all saw that he was a very eccentric, extraordinary young man. I am sure I distrusted him from the first. However, it does not matter in the least, for Daphne has done very much better than that, and she will have a title into the bargain. Lord Cheam is devoted to her and she is very happy. Young Carter has gone away—they say to Italy—I suppose he is upset at the news. Ruth has grown very tall. I had to send for a doctor as she seemed so unwell. He said that she ought to lead a very quiet life because her heart is weak. He told me to give her plenty of nourishing food, but he did not say how I was to pay for it. Your father is well, but very angry with Nicholas, and also with Mr. Baynes' new curate who calls himself a Catholic! Except for darling Daphne our children are no comfort to us at all. If I had the money to pay for your journey I should ask you to come home. By the way, you have not sent me any of your salary this last month. You must not get into the selfish habit of spending it all on yourself. Children ought to show their gratitude to their parents for all that they have received from them in the past."

As Ursula read the letter she seemed transported back to Pentarn, as if by some magical process. She saw the sea beating up against the Cornish cliffs, blurring their gaunt granite sides with a mist of foam. She could see the Island lifting its blunt shape

against the dark blue line of the Atlantic. She could hear the sea-gulls uttering their tortured restless cries. The wind was shrieking through the trees in the rectory garden, the thunder of the sea was in her ears.

So Daphne was to be married at last!

Ursula had never before heard of Lord Cheam; his brief days of unsuccessful statesmanship were long past. She tried to picture him but failed. He was an old man, at least thirty-five years older than Daphne. He was nearly as old as her own father, and considerably older than Mrs. Finch. But he was rich. Perhaps he would even be able to help Nicholas. Or was it too late? Nicholas, a mere boy, not yet twenty, had been forced to leave the country by his father. She could picture Nicholas, bitter, sullen, reckless, with black knitted brows, and dark defiant eyes. She wished she had been there to comfort him, to help him. As a boy he had always turned to her when he had got into a worse scrape than usual, and had suffered physically from his father's violence. He must have gone away with the sound of his father's raging, his mother's weeping, in his ears. Ursula had always had a tender and soft spot for Nicholas in her heart. She loved him almost better than Ruth, and it nearly broke her heart now to know that he had gone forth like that alone to fight his way in an unknown country. And Ruth—she felt anxious about Ruth. The girl was not strong enough to fill the place her own departure had left empty. The news from home disturbed her, although it was easy to see that to Mrs. Finch, Daphne's engagement amply compensated for all the ills and disasters that might occur to Ruth and Nicholas.

She cried a little, feeling suddenly rather home-sick, and wishing she were at hand to help Ruth,

and to find out where Nicholas was and write to him. It was some little time before she remembered that Humphrey's letter was still lying there, unopened, and unread.

It was very short, brief and business-like.

"Dear Miss Finch: I have only to-day returned home after a delightful trip to Norway and Sweden. I was greeted on arrival with the news of your sister's engagement to old Cheam. She might have done much worse, for he is considered a very warm man indeed. She has left here so I have had no opportunity of congratulating her, as she is on a visit to his eldest daughter, Lady Salvage. I am sending you a little parcel of books which I hope you will receive safely. My mother tells me that she believes you are still in Rome. I hope you have not spent the whole summer there. You might write and relieve my anxiety on this point. Are you happy in your present surroundings? I do entreat you to leave them if you are not. I have an idea you endure too meekly. It is a bad habit, and may become chronic if too freely indulged in.

"Yours very sincerely,

"HUMPHREY WILLMOT."

It was kind and friendly, and it showed her that she was not quite forgotten. Daphne's engagement had obviously left him cold, as the saying is. The letter tranquilized her. If she ever wrote to tell any one of the step she had so recently taken she thought it would be Humphrey Willmot. But perhaps it would be wiser not to write to him at all. Even this little cool friendly letter had made her heart beat with something of the old violence it had known when she had come upon him unawares at Pentarn. She must not think of Humphrey any

more. Her work lay here. She must be brave and hopeful and diligent. The thought of him weakened her, took from her something of her high courage.

She put aside the two letters and began to pack up her few possessions. Then she bade farewell to the nuns and drove in a cab back to the flat. Her last two lire went to pay the man, she had not a single *soldo* left. But perhaps now that Madame Garroni was returning, she would remember to give her those arrears of her salary which ought to have gone to Pentarn many weeks ago.

Mario, true to his promise, came round soon after six o'clock to help her, and they spent quite a merry two hours restoring the apartment to order. Mario took off his coat and worked energetically, dusting and polishing the floors. At eight o'clock he said:

"Now go and put on your hat, and we'll have some dinner at a restaurant."

Ursula was beginning to expostulate, but he cut her short.

"Nonsense! You must eat, and there's absolutely nothing in the house but coffee and bread. In the morning we must replenish the larder."

She shook her head.

"I can't, you know. I haven't a *soldo!*"

His face fell. "Hasn't Arabella paid you?"

"Not—not very lately. I think she forgot before she went away."

"But *cara mia,* how have you lived? I mean while you were here, before you went to the convent?"

"I had a little money then. And while I was ill I couldn't eat. I only wanted a little milk. You see half the time I didn't know what I was doing."

"It's perfectly abominable!" he declared wrathfully. "What did she expect you to do while she was away?"

"I suppose she thought I had some," said Ursula.

Mario took out a pocketbook and extracted therefrom two ten-lire notes.

"That'll do for the *spese* to-morrow," he said, giving them to her. "I'll get it back from Arabella. How dare she go off like that and leave you alone without money?"

"Oh, she didn't mean it. She probably forgot—"

"She is a miser. I dare say she finds it convenient to forget. Now are you coming to dine with me? It's getting late, you know."

"Yes, if you really want me to," she said. The prospect of the little adventure excited her. She had never dined at a restaurant in her life, and the novelty attracted her. She washed her hands, put on a clean white blouse, the best she had, and a hat, and set forth with Mario through the lighted streets. Rome was astir with throngs of pedestrians, carriages, motors.

Mario knew that she was tired, so he took her to a restaurant close at hand in the Corso. They had a joyous little meal, and he seemed to enjoy the evening quite as much as Ursula did. It was her last taste of freedom, and she knew that with Madame Garroni's return there would be a resumption of the old life, the ceaseless work, the perpetual fault-finding, the meals made wretched with Garroni's outbursts of temper, the nights broken by the children's wakefulness and crying. Just for this evening she would be happy, and Mario knew that he had never seen her look so bright and animated before. She was a new Ursula who had had the courage to break the old chains.

When dinner was over Mario walked back with her to the flat. At the top of the stairs he bade her good-night.

"Good-night, and thank you," said Ursula.

CHAPTER XX

ON the following morning Ursula rose early and went to the Dominican church to hear Mass. It was the first time she had returned thither since she had gone there to fetch the letter of introduction to Mother Lucia, and when she reflected upon all that had happened since she felt a strange thankfulness. She was glad that she had had courage now to persevere. But for her illness and the dreadful despondency that had supervened, she might never have been led to seek that path along which so many pilgrims have marched to their spiritual goal. Indeed it seemed to Ursula now that she was one of a special army who had not had the happiness to be born and brought up in the Catholic faith but who had been called thither as individual souls by a perfectly clear and direct appeal.

She went back to the flat when Mass was over, swallowed a hasty cup of coffee, ate a piece of dry bread, and then went out to do the marketing for the day. It was September now, and the grapes had just been brought in from the Roman hills. Ursula looked longingly at their dim purple and golden clusters, but she resisted the temptation to purchase any of them. Madame Garroni never permitted her to buy anything that was not absolutely essential. She had not been back in the house very long before voices and footsteps on the stairs announced the arrival of the Garroni family from its annual *villeggiatura.*

After a night in a hot train it cannot be said of many women that they look their best, and it certainly could not be said of Madame Garroni. She had grown much stouter during those weeks at

the seaside, and her unclean blouse of dusky white could scarcely be coaxed into buttoning across her large person. Her unwashed face was red and slightly greasy; her hair was oddly disheveled and hung in wisps over her forehead. Nor was she in a good temper, for she was tired, and neither she nor the children had had any sleep that night. Alda had kept them all awake, and Guido had displayed an unprecedented selfishness by insisting upon traveling in a smoking-carriage!

Little Alda was still apparently in disgrace, for she sat on the floor weeping.

"Now, stop that, Alda!" said Madame Garroni, after bestowing a hasty greeting upon Ursula, who went into the kitchen to deposit the results of the morning's shopping. She returned just in time to see Madame Garroni administer a sharp impatient slap to her elder child.

Alda gave a little shriek, and made a rush toward Ursula, flinging herself into her arms.

"Put her down!" commanded Madame Garroni; "that child is becoming more unbearable every day. Come here at once, Alda. Miss Finch, you are not to try to prevent her!"

She caught up Alda in her arms, and gave her a succession of sounding slaps which made her scream and struggle. Rosina, terrified at her sister's fate, began to scream too.

"They are tired with their journey and I am sure they must want their breakfast. Do let me take them and put them to bed," said Ursula, in a pacifying tone.

She picked up Alda in her arms and, calling to Rosina, took them both off to the nursery, away from their angry and irritated mother. It had made her blood boil to see poor little Alda treated like that, for the child was tired out and was not really naughty

at all. She wondered for the first time if Madame Garroni was in the habit of treating her children cruelly. She had never seen her look so red and angry before.

She sat down upon a low chair in the nursery, and began to soothe and comfort poor little Alda. She held her closely, kissing her, murmuring gentle words in her ear. Then she quietly undressed them, put them into their cribs, and was rewarded by seeing them both fall asleep before she went to prepare the breakfast.

Madame Garroni's temper had not improved, and from what Ursula was able to gather from the scraps of information vouchsafed to her, their sojourn at the seaside could not have been an altogether enjoyable one. The rooms were small and inconvenient; they had been extremely crowded, Alda had slept with her grandmother and Rosina with her parents. Madame Garroni had had to slave after the children—as she expressed it—all day. Alda had been very troublesome, and she had formed the opinion that Miss Finch had spoiled her. She used to be far more tractable and obedient.

During the days that followed Ursula did her best to keep the little girls out of their mother's way. Little Alda especially annoyed her, and being a nervous, highly strung child she was terrified of her mother, and fear made her clumsy and awkward. Rosina being more placid, and of a more normal type, fared better, in addition to which she had always been a greater favorite with her mother.

Ursula soon perceived that Madame Garroni did not intend to replace Anna. Her own tasks were therefore greatly augmented, for she now had to do all the cooking and most of the housework. Often she was so tired that she could hardly drag her weary limbs as far as the Pincio or the Borghese Gardens,

to give the children their customary walk. But she was reading the life of St. Zita, and it gave her courage and a certain supernatural endurance. It did not occur to her that it would be quite easy for her to find a far more desirable post through Mother Lucia who was often asked to recommend Catholic Englishwomen as governesses in Italian families. Her work here seemed more than ever clearly defined. When she was with the children she often found opportunities of telling them the truths of their religion. Alda drank it in with a strange ready eagerness, as if her little soul were ardently athirst for its nourishment. As often as she dared Ursula took them both into a church to pray. Sometimes on Sunday she even succeeded in hearing Mass with them. The children were very devoted to her and obeyed her readily. Old Signora Garroni watched her with approving eyes. Mario had informed her of the "mees" conversion.

It was a hard and in many ways a mortified life, but Ursula had long been inured to hardship, and she was far less unhappy than of old, as people always are when they have the wisdom to perceive the purpose underlying all their daily life.

A week or two after her return Madame Garroni received an English newspaper from Mrs. Burton, containing the announcement of Daphne's engagement to Lord Cheam. She wondered why Ursula had not mentioned this important event to her. She felt a certain snobbish regret that she had not made things easier for her. Perhaps the girl would want to leave her now. Her sister's marriage would naturally affect her. Madame Garroni did not wish Ursula to go away, for she was both cheap and willing. She saved her a servant, and ate far less than servants did.

She went into the kitchen, holding the newspaper

in her hand. The October day was summer-like, and despite the heat that still prevailed in Rome, Ursula was standing over the gas-cooker, preparing the midday meal.

"I hope you are not boiling that macaroni too long," said Madame Garroni; "you know how much Guido dislikes it when it is at all soft. He is the head of the house and his tastes must be considered. We English, of course, prefer it soft."

She looked keenly at Ursula. The girl was pale and heavy-eyed. Alda had been awake nearly all night.

"You never told me this wonderful news about your sister," continued Madame Garroni; "it will no doubt affect your own prospects. I don't suppose a wealthy man like Lord Cheam—I am sure he must be wealthy from his London address—will care to have his sister-in-law earning her own living."

"As a cook?" interposed Ursula. She regretted the words directly they were uttered. But the heat had upset her a little, and she knew that she could never do the macaroni to suit Garroni's taste. He was seldom satisfied with his food.

She stirred the contents of the saucepan.

"You are not a cook," said Madame Garroni, "I engaged you as a nursery-governess for my children. Of course, I expected you also to make yourself useful. Plenty of work—that's the way to keep girls out of mischief, as my father used to say. I am very thankul to him now."

"I don't suppose it will make much difference to Lord Cheam which I am," said Ursula; "he is never likely to hear about it."

"Still, it's a great match for her, isn't it? I always think clergymen's daughters are much to be envied. Men always think they have been so carefully brought up! I wonder if they will come to Rome for

their honeymoon? A honeymoon in Italy! That was every girl's dream when I was young, Miss Finch."

"Was it?" said Ursula, hardly heeding her.

"Things never turn out quite as one expects," pursued Madame Garroni, with uncomfortable recollections of her own wedding-journey. "I suppose you have heard full particulars from home?"

"I heard about it from my mother. Daphne never writes," said Ursula.

"Of course your mother must be delighted! I wonder where they met? Not at poor little Pentarn, I am sure!"

"No, I think it was in Scotland. Daphne has been away visiting all the summer."

"I suppose she is very pretty?" said Madame Garroni, with a sigh.

"Yes, she is considered beautiful."

"Well, I am sure you are all very much to be congratulated. I am afraid I can hardly hope to keep you here now that your sister is going to be a peeress!"

She went out of the kitchen, satisfied that so far no plans had been made for removing Ursula. She wished, however, that the girl would be more communicative. But perhaps she was really as ignorant as she seemed to be. She hardly ever received letters from home, and she certainly could have very little leisure for writing to her people. What did she tell them when she wrote to them? Did she ever complain? That remark about the cooking for instance had been the first word suggestive of complaint that Madame Garroni had ever heard from her lips. Of course, it was very impertinent of her to speak like that. Still, it was a relief to know that she was not contemplating an immediate departure. It was so difficult to find a servant now, and still more difficult

to induce her to stay when she was found, that it was a comfort to have someone there who would do the work and who could hardly go away even if she wanted to.

At luncheon Guido Garroni said:

"Who cooked this macaroni?"

"Miss Finch."

"It's ruined—it's not fit to eat. As if any Englishwoman could ever cook macaroni properly! Why don't you do it yourself? What has made you so lazy all of a sudden?" His face was red and angry, and although he spoke in rapid Italian Ursula could catch the gist of his words. "I thought you brought Miss Finch out here to look after the children? That is her department, it is your business to see that my food is properly cooked!"

Madame Garroni looked severely at Ursula, with an expression that seemed to indicate clearly, "Didn't I tell you?" She was annoyed that Guido should vent his wrath upon herself.

"I knew how it would be," he went on angrily, "if you went to England to visit your rich idle relations. You have not done a stroke of work since you came back. You leave it all to the 'mees.' As if she had not enough to do to look after the children!"

"The children want very little looking after when they are in the house," she returned. "Miss Finch only has to take them out for their walks. She has nothing in the world to do—you ought to be glad for me to have a little help. I have always had a servant all my life, and if I have not kept two it is because you are so miserly with my money!"

She was angry and she raised her voice as she spoke. Alda began to whimper, and turned to hide her face against Ursula's shoulder.

"Take Alda out of the room at once! She shall

not come back till she has learned to behave," said Madame Garroni.

She did not wish Ursula to hear the scolding that Guido was bent upon giving her. It would be mistaken kindness to let the girl pass her days in idleness. And if she understood anything of what he was saying she might conceivably imagine that he was actually taking her part.

The storm continued and had hardly subsided by the time Ursula returned, holding Alda by the hand. She had managed to soothe and pacify the child, who took her seat again quietly at the table.

CHAPTER XXI

ONE day old Caterina Garroni put her head into the salotto where her daughter-in-law was lying on the sofa, reading a novel which had just arrived from England.

"Arabella," she said, "I think you had better come into the nursery. Alda is ill—she has fever."

"Nonsense! She's only lazy. I'll go and make her get up."

She rose heavily from her comfortable recumbent posture. Alda had been tiresome and fretful of late. She needed correction. Madame Garroni repaired to the nursery.

The room was darkened by the wooden shutters closed across the windows. Rosina was playing on the floor with some bricks. On her little crib Alda lay with upturned face. She was very white except for the pink fever-patches that burnt in her cheeks. As her mother approached she made a shrinking movement and began to whimper. "'Mees'! 'Mees'!" she cried.

"You need not call 'mees' when I am here. Why are you lying in bed? Do you want another whipping?"

She was going to take the child by the wrist, but Ursula came swiftly across the room and with a quiet but authoritative gesture released Alda.

"She must on no account get up. She is very ill," she said firmly.

Madame Garroni was cowered by the expression in Ursula's face. It was quite an appreciable time before she regained sufficient self-control to reply.

"How dare you interfere between me and my children? Don't you suppose a mother knows best?"

"I am sure you ought to send for a doctor as soon as possible," said Ursula.

She remembered her own illness, wondering how she had ever struggled through it, without nurse or doctor to attend to her. But Alda was a frail little thing; she could not possibly be left to fight it single-handed.

"A doctor? Stuff and nonsense! I never send for one unless there is real illness."

Nevertheless she went out of the room feeling thoroughly uncomfortable. She couldn't forget the expression in Ursula's face when she was defending Alda from her. Madame Garroni was not a cruel woman but she liked to have her own way, and she was certain that she knew far more about children than Ursula did.

She suffered too from a chronic inability to accustom herself to the ways of her foreign life, and this engendered a continual irritability which was now becoming actual ill-temper. Too often, alas, she had vented this of late upon little Alda.

"I shall wait and see how she is this evening," she reflected. "It's no good sending for a doctor unless one is quite sure it is necessary. It's waste of money."

Mario came home to luncheon that day; he had just returned to Rome. They were sitting at the table when he appeared. Guido had been detained at the office and had sent a message to say he would not be back.

"Why, where's Alda?" he said, looking round the table.

"Alda is in bed. She has got a little fever to-day," said Madame Garroni.

She was sorry that Mario had come back just then. He would be certain to uphold Miss Finch in

her wish that the doctor might be sent for. Italians were always so fussy about children.

"Fever! How long's she been ill?" asked Mario.

"Only just this morning. And she isn't really ill. You needn't worry about her. Miss Finch isn't accustomed to children and their perpetual little ailments. They are always much worse if too much notice is taken of them! I was never encouraged to be ill as a child. I can remember being punished for saying I had a headache."

She was fond of referring to her own Spartan upbringing, as an excuse for the mitigated severity of her own rule.

"Cold baths all the year round," she went on, "whether you had to break the ice or not! Such chilblains as we used to have! There was no nonsense of indulgence in *our* home. We were brought up to be hardy."

"I congratulate you upon having survived," said Mario, with a flash of white teeth. "But little Alda is a delicate child, you mustn't try to harden her." He shrugged his shoulders. "Has my grandmother seen her?"

"Yes, it was she who told me first that Alda wasn't well. I never knew such a country for clinical thermometers. Even the children know how to take their own temperatures!"

Mario felt vaguely anxious. He was devoted to both his little cousins, and they regarded him as a big, kind, elder brother. The moment luncheon was over he left the room and went straight to the nursery. Alda was lying asleep. Her face looked pinched and drawn, her breathing was labored. She stirred and moaned in her sleep.

He was still standing by the crib when the door opened and Ursula came into the room.

"Of course, she must see a doctor at once. I'll go and fetch one," he said, in a low tone.

"Oh, do you think she's very ill?"

"I don't know. I'm no judge. But I don't like the look of her, and Arabella hates sending for the doctor. Did Alda sleep last night?"

"Hardly at all. I gave her a little milk from time to time, she seemed so thirsty."

"So you didn't sleep either?"

He was astonished at her endurance. He knew enough of her life to know that those broken nights must tax her strength very heavily.

"Oh, that doesn't matter. If only Madame Garroni would see that she's really ill!"

"And that you can't bring up a delicate baby like that on cold baths and whippings!" he said, grimly. He laid his hand lightly on Alda's, and his face grew grave. The child's hand was dry and hot; the touch of it burnt him. "She ought to have had a doctor hours ago," he said, looking at Ursula. "You'll stay with her, of course? Don't let her mother disturb her."

"Of course I shall stay. If she wakes she is sure to want some milk."

By night the little flat was in a state of untoward commotion. Alda was very ill, and the doctor, hastily fetched by Mario, gave orders that she must be watched all night. There was no question of her getting up, and Madame Garroni, convinced now that the child was not malingering, became distracted with anxiety. She took up her post jealously in the nursery, and would hardly allow anyone except Guido to approach the little sufferer. Quarters were found for Ursula and Rosina in a passage-room that led into the kitchen. It was an uncomfortable and airless spot, for it possessed no window, and there was scarcely room in it for their two beds. For years

the endless succession of "Annas" had slept there, soundly no doubt after the strenuous exertions of the day. A ragged dark curtain alone separated it from the public passage to the kitchen, and beyond this there was no attempt at privacy. "What do servants want with rooms except to sleep in?" Madame Garroni would inquire from time to time, if any complaints reached her ears as to the inadequacy of the accommodation.

Ursula had begged to be allowed to share Madame Garroni's watch in the nursery. She feared that Alda might be frightened when she awoke in the night, to discover that she was alone with her mother. She feared, too, that Madame Garroni would succumb to sleep during those long hours. But her timid request was refused, and she went to bed about midnight, having placed in readiness all that was likely to be wanted for mother or child during the night.

One morning a few days later when a gleam of uncertain grey light stole down the passage from the skylight in the hall a step came haltingly, shufflingly, over the red tiles. Ursula looked up from her pillow, and saw the aged nightcapped head of old Caterina Garroni peering round the curtain.

"Are you awake, 'mees'?" she said, in a hoarse whisper.

She was certainly a very unattractive-looking old woman, careless of her personal appearance, indifferent to cleanliness, but her fierce piety was a quality that could not be overlooked and compensated for much. She was also, as Ursula knew, passionately solicitous for her two little grandchildren. Guido had long ago broken her heart. Once he had been a good boy, a good son, till that evil day when he had been induced to become a Freemason. A drunken frolic had enmeshed him in a life-long

slavery. No man in all Rome spoke so violently against the Church and its priests as he did. The one comfort of her declining years was her grandson, Mario, who seemed to have inherited all the beautiful piety and fervor of his dead mother.

"Do you want anything?" said Ursula. Somehow the old woman's appearance at this early hour gave her a sharp pang of anxiety. What had happened in the night? She had lain awake for hours, and she had heard no unusual movement in the flat. If Alda had been taken worse, surely they would have come to call her?

"Alda is going to die," said Caterina, "and Guido will let her die like a dog. The child was baptized, but he does not know it. A priest ought to come to anoint her. How are we to get one?" She looked piteously at Ursula.

"To die?" echoed Ursula, incredulously. "Is she so much worse?"

She rose hurriedly and began to brush her hair.

"I would go myself," said the old woman, "but if Guido found out I had done it, he would put me into the street. And where should I go to?" Her ancient rheumy eyes shone with tears.

She was very infirm now and could hardly hobble as far as the nearest church; it was always an effort to her to go to Mass on Sundays.

"I will go and fetch a priest," said Ursula, beginning to dress.

"You? And if they put you into the street? It would be worse for you, a stranger, a foreigner."

"I am not afraid," said Ursula.

"Of course she is in her first innocence, she will assuredly go to heaven. But she must have Extreme Unction—the Viaticum—who ever heard of a Catholic dying without those consolations? A crucifix in her hands, poor little lamb, and someone to

tell her that she is going to our blessed Lord, and that the Holy Madonna will gather her under her robe!"

She sat down on a chair, and began to weep the pitiful senile tears of the aged. The great sobs made her thin bony body heave. She wore an unclean grey wrapper, and her thick grey hair was awry under the nightcap. Like most Italian women her hair even in old age was beautifully thick with a kind of natural wave in it, but she had ceased to attend to it properly, or to give it the necessary brushing. She was too old, and her memory was growing weak.

"I will go," said Ursula again.

She was fully dressed now, and she put on a small straw hat.

"You must look after Rosina while I am out," she told Caterina; "you must on no account leave her alone. Promise me to stay with her."

"I will take care of her," said the old woman. "Perhaps she will sleep till you come back."

Ursula crept very quietly to the front door. She slid back the two heavy bolts which secured it, opened it cautiously, and went down the five flights of stairs into the street below. Outside the autumn air was fresh and invigorating, almost as if there had been a touch of early frost in the night. The oleanders in the courtyard tossed back their rosy heads as the wind stirred them. In the lodge the ancient porter sat drinking his morning coffee; he greeted her with his usual *Buon giorno, signorina,* as she passed. She crossed the little piazza hurriedly, and walked straight to the church where she had seen the Dominican on that evening after her illness.

The six o'clock Mass had just begun. As she entered, the priest crossed over to the Gospel side of

the altar. Ursula knelt down in the shadows at the back of the church. Yes, it was true; they might throw her into the street, as Caterina had prophesied. But she didn't seem to mind. She had friends in Rome. Mother Lucia, for instance. The English priest who had received her. They would help her to find something. But she hoped that Madame Garroni would at least let her stay until Alda died.

Could it really be true that she was going to die? Was it only perhaps Caterina's anxiety that made her think so? The Sanctus bell rang. Ursula bowed her head. This was the moment of the priest's Memento for the living. She found herself praying for all the Garroni family, for Mario, old Caterina, little Alda and Rosina, yes, and for Guido and his wife. Then for all at Pentarn, her father and mother, Daphne, Nicholas and Ruth, and—Humphrey Willmot. A bell rang sharply. Again she bowed her head, only looking up for a second when the priest elevated the Sacred Host above his head for all to see and worship. "My Lord and my God," she whispered. Yes, that was what they had taught her to say, to repeat the magnificent profession of faith first uttered by St. Thomas.

When Mass was over she went into the sacristy, and explained her errand to the priest in broken Italian.

He shook his head. "I am afraid you must go to the Parroco," he said, and told her the name of the parish church. "Of course, if you could not find him and it was very urgent I should be able to come."

Ursula hurried away. She felt now that perhaps she ought not to have stayed in this way to hear Mass; she ought to have found out at once that she had to go to another church. It was now nearly half an hour since she had left the flat, and perhaps

Rosina had awakened. Madame Garroni might also have discovered her absence, might be wondering whither she had gone. Very soon Guido would be clamoring for his morning coffee; he was always in a bad temper if he was kept waiting for it. She pictured the place in an uproar, while the poor little dying child lay there, indifferent, half conscious.

The priest promised to come at once, and Ursula started off upon her homeward journey. She ran almost the whole way, and breathlessly climbed the five flights of stairs. The top flight was the worst of all, it went straight up without break or curve, and the steps were very steep. There were twenty of them—she had often counted them. Cautiously she opened the front door. The flat was still hushed in silence. There seemed to be no one stirring. In the passage-room little Rosina lay asleep, with old Caterina sitting somnolently in a chair by her side. Ursula took off her hat and went into the kitchen to prepare the coffee.

Her heart was beating with excitement, and a certain nervousness. As well as she could in her broken Italian she had explained to the priest the kind of reception he might meet with if Garroni chanced upon him. He had seemed quite undeterred. It was not the first time, nor would it be the last, that he would enter the house of a violent Freemason to administer the last Sacraments to the dying. Besides he knew Mario, and was already acquainted with the circumstances of the case.

Ursula, as she set the water on to boil and put the breakfast ready with the quick and practised skill of a person to whom such tasks have become second nature, was saying to herself: "This is why I came here—this is why I came."

CHAPTER XXII

THE front door bell rang. That must be the priest. How quickly he had come. Ursula went down the passage to admit him. He entered, and she heard the murmur of Latin words. She longed to know what he was saying.

The nursery door was shut, and Ursula opened it quietly and looked in. The room was in partial darkness. Madame Garroni, fully dressed, sat in an armchair, fast asleep. She had evidently fallen asleep from exhaustion; her breathing sounded labored. Alda lay in her crib, tranquil, too weak to move.

Ursula went up to her.

"Alda, the priest has come to see you." She kissed the child.

Then she went out into the passage, praying that Madame Garroni might not awake till his mission was completed. She was a heavy sleeper. Ursula dreaded to think of the effect the priest's presence would have upon her should she suddenly awake.

Presently she heard footsteps. It must be Guido, disturbed perhaps by their faint movements. He would want his coffee, and then he would naturally go into the nursery to see his little daughter. Like all Italians he was devoted to his children, and would have spoiled and indulged them to the top of his bent had not his wife insisted upon adhering to her own more Spartan régime. They had had many quarrels on the subject, and sometimes Garroni had roughly restrained her from punishing Alda. He was very fond of Alda. She was such a thorough little Italian. Very like his own sister, Mario's mother, who had died.

He came out of his room, still unshaven, and blinking like an owl.

"*Buon giorno, signorina,*" he said, sleepily.

The doctor had given him a fright yesterday, but of course Alda was better this morning. Something in Ursula's calm, almost cheerful, aspect, seemed to assure him that this was the case. Alda was quite a strong little thing really; all his family had good constitutions. Why, his own mother was still alive, and he a man of past sixty! She was eighty-four years old, and strong as a horse. Never suffered any ailment, except a touch of rheumatism in the winter.

"Your coffee is quite ready," said Ursula. "I will put it in the dining-room for you."

"I'll go and have a look at the *bambina* first."

He moved a step toward the nursery. Ursula's heart stopped beating for one sickening second. If she could only prevail upon him to have his breakfast first! Her one fear was not that he should discover the presence of the priest, but that he should interrupt him before his pious work was completed.

"No, don't go in. She was awake just now—she's quite quiet; you can see her presently."

"Awake? Then she's better—she'll know me. She didn't know me last night. I'll go and kiss her."

Ursula made a swift movement and interposed her slim person between him and the nursery door. She *must* detain him. She must stave off the evil moment, just a little longer. Afterward, it wouldn't matter.

"I really think it would be better for you not to disturb her," she said. She steadied her voice, it sounded extraordinarily cool and composed.

"I shall not disturb her. I'll only put my head in just to see."

"You will make a noise in opening the door," said Ursula, almost in desperation.

At any moment the priest might emerge. His task would surely soon be finished. She comforted herself with the thought.

Garroni became suspicious and excited.

"Why, I do believe you're hiding something from me, 'mees!' She is worse, perhaps, and you won't tell me?"

He raised his voice a little. Soon he would inevitably awaken his wife.

"No, I don't think she is worse. At least it's difficult to tell. But it is very important to keep her quiet."

"Where is my wife?" demanded Guido. It was time Arabella came to despatch Miss Finch to her own room. How impertinent of her to interfere!

"She is in the nursery—she was asleep just now."

"Asleep? But she mustn't sleep like that! I thought she was watching Alda."

"I'm going in to help her in a moment." Ursula stood with her back against the door in a resolute attitude. "Do, please, have your coffee first," she pleaded.

Garroni lost his temper. Anxiety had made him irritable, and he began to feel certain that Ursula was hiding something from him. Else why was she trying so forcibly to prevent him from entering the room? She had no right to interfere between a father and his child. He pushed her away with a sudden rough movement that almost overbalanced her. She saved herself from falling by clutching at the wall, but before she could recover from the attack he had opened the door and walked into the nursery. He left the door open, and Ursula gazed into the room with terror-stricken eyes.

The priest was kneeling by the side of Alda's crib. His lips moved in prayer. Madame Garroni, roughly aroused by the stir of her husband's

entrance, sat up rubbing her eyes. She was not yet fully awake, and she regarded the priest with an expression of incredulity, as if he had formed part of a waking dream. Guido Garroni stood speechless in the middle of the room. The scene seemed to have temporarily hypnotized him.

The priest rose from his knees. His face was calm and imperturbable, motionless as that of a statue in a museum. Madame Garroni was now fully awake. She had the absurd instinct of most suddenly awakened persons to declare that she had not really been asleep, and that she had heard and known all that was going on. When she saw the priest standing there close to the crib she seemed to realize that any such asseverations on her part would be useless.

Alda's eyes were open; she was smiling in a quiet, remote fashion, as if her little spirit were already passing away from her weak body. In her small, shrunken hands she was clasping a crucifix.

" 'Mees!' " she called, in a feeble, shrill voice, whose sound was not quite natural.

Ursula approached the bed. She bent down to hear the words.

" 'Mees,' the dear Madonna is coming to fetch me. She will be kind to me; like you, she loves all little children. And I have received my first communion as you promised me once that I should."

Her voice trailed off, her lips were parted in a smile.

Garroni had heard his child's words. They taught him that she was going to die, and that she was fully aware of it. That scoundrel of a priest had no doubt been frightening her! Telling her lies perhaps about heaven and hell! Yet, there was no sign of fear in little Alda's face. Her eyes were full of a shining joy. It made him think almost that

she was eager to go, as a child is often eager for a great change to come to pass.

The Madonna was coming to fetch her! So she was not ignorant after all of Catholic teaching. She wanted to leave them, to go out into the unknown. There had been a plot to fetch the priest. Whose doing was it? Not Mario's; he hadn't slept in the house last night. His mother? She was too infirm to go out so far. The English "mees" who had certainly been very devoted to his children? She was a Protestant or he would never have had her in the house. Nevertheless, it was she who would have to explain the priest's presence. She had known of it, for she had tried to keep him, Alda's father, out of the room. For years Garroni had not spoken to a priest, had not found himself in the same room with one. The sight of this one made him suddenly feel guilty and conscience-stricken. Why did he stand there, his lips still moving in prayer? Why didn't he go away?

Garroni was passionately attached to his children. Especially he had loved little Alda with her enchanting, graceful ways. His anger suddenly gave place to a violent outburst of grief. He flung himself face downwards upon the bed, and burst into a paroxysm of sobbing.

It was too late for him to disturb Alda with his tempestuous uncontrolled weeping. Already life was ebbing fast. Her breath came in little jerks. A faint sound issued from her throat. Ursula still held her hand. She had never seen death before; she had not thought it could be such an easy, such an almost beautiful thing.

Suddenly the priest's voice became audible in the room. *De profundis clamavi ad te, Domine: Domine exaudi vocem meam: Fiant aures tuae intendentes, in vocem deprecationis meae.*

The *De Profundis*—the psalm that is used for the dead.

Ursula closed the baby eyelids. Madame Garroni stood by her side, amazed, speechless. It was not true! Alda was not dead. Why, a week ago she had been running about. It was all a mistake. The priest had frightened her, had hastened her death.

Sustinuit anima mea in verbo ejus: speravit anima mea in Domino.

Presently the priest withdrew. Ursula followed him quietly out of the room.

"Do you think he will refuse to allow her to have Catholic burial?" he asked Ursula.

"He will oppose it, I know. And so will his wife; she will wish to have her buried as a Protestant. But Mario will come, he may have some influence."

"Tell him to come and see me," said the priest.

When he had gone Ursula went into the passage-room. Rosina was awake and had begun to cry for her breakfast. Old Caterina Garroni was trying in vain to soothe her. The children had always been a little afraid of their grandmother, and Rosina amid her sobs was screaming: " 'Mees!' 'Mees!' I want 'mees!' "

"It is all over," she said to Caterina; "poor little Alda is dead. The priest was only just in time. She was anointed, she died quite peacefully. Her parents are with her now." She took Rosina up in her arms and began to soothe her.

She was sorry for the parents. They were, she knew, suffering terribly. In the old days she would have thought it cruel, almost wicked, to have opposed them in the way she had done, especially at such a time. But her point of view had completely changed. She saw all things now from the Catholic standpoint. This little frozen body that so lately

had been Alda belonged to its Mother, the Church. It had had its inalienable right to go forth comforted and consoled under that august protection, and now it could also claim the right to have the splendid majesty of the Mass enacted in its presence. *For the living and the dead.* It must not be cheated of a single one of its prerogatives. This was a spiritual claim of far greater importance than any mere parental prejudice.

She did not at present stop to think of the probable consequences of the morning's events upon herself. Probably when they discovered the part she had played they would turn her into the street. Unless, perhaps, the sight of his dead child converted Guido. There was something terrible to Ursula in the sight of his rebellion. Once he had been a loyal subject of the Church. Once he had known her joys and consolations. But he had yielded himself to the Spirit of Evil. Again the words came back to her: *For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places.* The age-long warfare of the Church militant! Evil—the greatest perhaps of all mysteries—continually seeking its prey. Evil—the devourer of souls. And in the dreadful spectacle of Garroni's spiritual downfall she seemed to see that evil, organized, imbued with a deadly energy, a fatal unremitting activity. Organized against God, against His holy Church, fighting ceaselessly against God for the possession of the souls of men.

CHAPTER XXIII

MARIO appeared during the morning in response to a message from Ursula. Without a word he proceeded to the darkened nursery, and knelt down beside the little crib where Alda lay. She looked very beautiful, a study in black and white with her pale sculptured face that might have been wrought of the finest marble; her thick black hair brushed off her forehead, her long, dark eyelashes. The expression on her face was less childlike than it had been in life; it seemed to be informed with a new wisdom.

Mario stooped over her and kissed the white forehead, the frozen folded hands. So rapid had been her illness and death that it seemed to him now almost incredible. They had not been really anxious about her until yesterday evening. And already the short chapter of her life was closed. She was an angel in heaven. She had died in her first innocence. He did not attempt to restrain his tears, for he had loved the child very tenderly. But she was safe. That was the great thing. She had been gathered under the robe of the Madonna. She was perhaps to-day among the Holy Innocents.

Ursula had come in and knelt by his side. Both Garroni and his wife were resting after the emotion of the morning. She had not seen either of them since the departure of the priest. When she had returned to the nursery to offer her help they had refused to let her come into the room.

When Mario rose from his knees she followed him out of the room.

"I want to thank you," he said. The tears stood in his eyes, and he spoke in a strangled tone. He

was a little ashamed of his emotion in the presence of Ursula's calm. "You acted very quickly, very bravely. We must think about her funeral. Have they done anything yet?"

Ursula shook her head. "I haven't seen them since quite early this morning."

"Of course, she must have Catholic burial. Will Guido allow it, do you think?"

"He seemed very broken-hearted," said Ursula.

Mario's face hardened. "He will oppose it, nevertheless," he said. "I shall go and see the priest at once. I am thinking of you, Miss Finch. If you had to leave here—say quite suddenly at a moment's notice—have you made any plans? I mean is there any place that would receive you?"

She understood his meaning. If she helped him the retribution would fall upon herself. She thought for an instant of the few lire she had put by. When Madame Garroni had grudgingly paid her on her return from the seaside, Ursula had sent nothing home. She had had to repay the porter's wife for the milk and bread she had received when she was ill. There had not been much left when that was done. And if Daphne made this rich marriage surely she would be able to spare a few pounds from her dress allowance for the household at Pentarn.

"I think I could go to the convent, to Mother Lucia, until I can find something else," she said.

His face brightened. "Yes, that's a splendid idea. You'd be safe there. Then you will help me?"

"But I am helping you," she said.

Ursula had lost her old timidity. She possessed more self-confidence and things had grown clearer to her. When the way was thus unmistakably indicated, she had no hesitation about following it.

Mario made all the arrangements for a religious funeral. He saw the priest, and it was arranged

that there should be a Low Mass of requiem on the following morning at eight o'clock. The coffin would leave the house at half-past seven. A carriage was ordered, for Mario and Ursula both intended to go. Whether the parents would also accompany them was another matter. But Mario believed that Guido would be secretly thankful to have the arrangements taken out of his hands. He was too "fast bound in misery and iron" to be able to give his dead child the last tremendous privileges which the Church is able to bestow, but Mario believed that he would make no effort to oppose it.

Guido and his wife went out that afternoon. Everyone knew they had gone to the Campo Santo to choose a last resting-place for their little girl. It was late when they returned, and Mario had been anxiously awaiting them. He went into the darkened salotto and switched on the electric light. Presently Garroni and his wife came into the room.

"Are you going to the funeral to-morrow?" said Mario.

"Of course we are both going. We shall go direct to the Campo Santo."

"No," said Mario with quiet decision, "we shall go first to the church. There will be a Low Mass of requiem—I have arranged it all with the priest who was here this morning. You know it does not take long; it will be over in half an hour. Then we shall go to Verano with the priest."

Guido sprang to his feet, and his eyes protruded.

"You shall do nothing of the kind! You shall not interfere! What would my fellow-Masons say if they knew I had consented to such a thing? You forget my position; I might even lose my place in the firm. Besides poor little Alda was not baptized a Catholic; she was christened in the Protestant church."

"I beg your pardon—she was baptized by the priest. She had made her confession, and on her death-bed she received her first communion. She has a right to be buried as a Catholic." His voice was perfectly steady and very stern.

"Whose doing was this? Yours and my mother's I'll be bound! Or have you got that English 'mees' on your side? I could see that you were falling in love with each other. I heard you had been seen talking together on the Pincio when the children were playing."

His voice was raised and almost shrill with passion.

"I think you are making a great fuss about nothing," sobbed Madame Garroni, speaking for the first time. "Alda is dead, and what can it matter what becomes of a poor little dead body? It is horrible that you and Mario should quarrel over it like this. She could at least be buried like a Christian in the Protestant cemetery, and then Guido would not run the risk of quarreling with his firm."

It seemed to her an admirable compromise, a perfect solution of the difficulty, offending no one except Mario and his old grandmother, neither of whom could be said to count. What right had they, bigoted and priest-ridden as they both were, to oppose the parents in this matter of the funeral? Hadn't all the deceased members of her own family been buried as Protestants by clergymen of the Church of England, and who had ever been a penny the worse? But once let a priest come into the house, and nothing but bitter dissension was likely to follow.

"Alda was not a Protestant. She had a right to buried with the rites of the Church to which she belonged," said Mario.

"You are taking too much upon yourself, Mario," said Madame Garroni, weary of the argument which

she considered almost indecent at such a moment. This was what came of marrying a foreigner, you were always up against different standards. "You have no right to interfere. Alda was our own darling child, not yours, and you are responsible—you and your grandmother between you—for having hastened her death by calling in that priest to tell her she was going to die. Of course she was frightened."

"I did not call in the priest. I was not in the house. You know that perfectly well."

"You must have told Miss Finch to do so then. I suppose, as Guido says, you have been making love to her, and that is how you have got her on your side."

He colored at the intentionally insulting tone.

"I have done nothing of the kind."

"She is a clergyman's daughter, and she knows as well as I do that thousands of excellent people in England are buried every year as Protestants. It is the custom of our country. Our religion is as good as yours and has fewer errors!"

Mario was silent.

"Tell Miss Finch to come at once. I wish to speak to her," said Garroni; "I am determined to get to the bottom of this. I am convinced that she arranged for the priest to come this morning. There was no one else to go, and she tried to prevent me from going into the nursery while he was there."

Madame Garroni stared at him in astonishment. Was it true? Had Mario secretly acquired an influence over Ursula, so that if occasion arose she would be able to help him?

"It's impossible!" she exclaimed. "You must have made a mistake. She's a clergyman's daughter. If it's true of course she must leave us at once. But I should not have thought her capable of such deceit."

She went to the door and called softly: "Miss Finch! Miss Finch!"

Ursula appeared from the kitchen where she was engaged in cooking the dinner. She wore an apron over her dark dress. Her cheeks were flushed, from the heat of the fire. She was so tired and was feeling so unnerved and dispirited that she could hardly drag herself down the passage.

When she entered the salotto and saw Mario and the Garronis all sitting there together in dead silence, she became aware that the crisis had come. Would they really send her away to-night? Already it was getting late.

"We wish to speak to you," said Madame Garroni, assuming an attitude of majestic sorrow; "we don't wish to condemn you unheard. Is it true that you went out this morning and fetched a priest? I have just learned that my poor little baby had been forced to make a confession—a confession if you please—before she died."

Ursula was pale enough now. Her eyes shone brightly.

"Yes, it is quite true that I fetched the priest," she answered.

Now that the moment had actually come, she did not feel at all afraid.

A murmur of dismayed anger broke from her employers. But Mario's presence reassured her, although she knew that even without him she would not have felt too much afraid. She had done her duty; had fought her first little hard conflict for the Church.

"What made you do this when you knew perfectly well it would be against my husband's wishes as well as my own?"

Ursula was silent.

"You had better explain your conduct," growled Guido, in a threatening tone.

"I am a Catholic," said Ursula. "I sent for the priest because it was my duty to see that Alda did not die without one to give her the last rites of the Church."

"How long have you been a Roman Catholic?" inquired Madame Garroni.

"About six weeks. I was received while you were away."

"Have you told your people?"

"No, not yet."

"You were afraid, perhaps, of their displeasure?"

"I am of age. I can do as I choose," she answered

"Supposing they refuse to receive you again? I knew a girl at Penzance to whom that happened. We regarded it as a just punishment!" Ursula was silent. Of course that was what would happen to her. When her father knew he would probably forbid her to return home.

She was thinking: "What has made people so prejudiced? Why can't they learn a little about the Catholic Church, just enough to see how beautiful and holy it is?" Hadn't she herself come abroad with her mind filled with all those ancient prejudices, that false teaching against the Catholic Church, those three-century-old outcries against Rome? It seemed strange to live, as Madame Garroni did, in the heart of Christendom, and to remain so blind, so ignorant, so indifferent to that spiritual and mystical wealth that lay so close to her.

"I am not going to allow you to remain here," said Madame Garroni, with increased anger in her tone. "You have behaved in a sly, deceitful manner, and I don't consider you a suitable person to have the care of a young child like Rosina. I under-

stand now why you were gaining latterly such an influence over poor little Alda. Once or twice since our return home she would hardly come to me when I called her!"

Ursula thought that such reluctance could be fully accounted for on quite other grounds.

"I think we must ask you to leave the house directly after the funeral to-morrow. You have been paid up to the end of last month, and I consider that by your conduct you have forfeited any further wages that might have been owing to you!"

"Aunt Arabella!" broke out Mario, in indignation.

"Be silent, if you please, Mario. This is my business, not yours."

Was he in love with her? Perhaps they were secretly engaged? Was it really true that they had met each other on the Pincio when Miss Finch had taken the children there for a walk? Madame Garroni had her own reasons for not wishing to quarrel with Mario, for he paid half the rent of the flat, besides contributing liberally toward his board whenever he stayed there. He had inherited a little money from his father, and was in receipt of good pay.

"Miss Finch can always appeal to the Questura if you refuse to pay her," he said.

Madame Garroni had all an Englishwoman's instinctive dread of the law, whether it was represented by the police or by a court of justice. To her there was little to choose between criminal and legal procedure. Both the one and the other involved an amount of publicity that was very painful to people who, as the saying goes, kept themselves to themselves. If Ursula showed any disposition to make a fuss about payment she secretly resolved to give her all that she was entitled to. But she must go away.

She could not remain here. She would contaminate little Rosina. Madame Garroni began to feel that instead of punishing poor little Alda as she had rather often of late, she ought in reality to have blamed Ursula. She wished, now it was too late, that she had shown Alda less severity. People might withhold their sympathy from her at a time when she was really urgently in need of it. She had talked openly among her friends about Alda's fits of naughtiness, of the necessity of punishing her. "Disobedient about quite little things—she wouldn't always come when I called her. She would scream and shriek, and I couldn't allow that to go on." She could hear her own voice saying the words. People would remember it now that Alda was dead. They would say perhaps: "It won't break her heart, she never really cared about her. Look at the way she was always whipping her for quite little things." She couldn't pose as she would now have wished to pose as a bereaved broken-hearted mother. And it was quite clearly Miss Finch's fault. She had acquired a most sinister influence over the poor little thing; it had been particularly noticeable since their return. She wished that she had known sooner that poor little Alda wasn't to blame. But she would run no risks with Rosina.

"I will go away to-morrow if you wish," said Ursula, proudly.

Her work here was finished. She had done what she had come hither to do. And even if she stayed she would never be allowed to instruct Rosina as she had instructed Alda. She would be watched. Suddenly, the future appeared to her cold and dark. She shrank before it as the homeless must naturally shrink when they are confronted without warning with their own roofless, penniless condition. She felt as if the wide world had no room for her, no

resting-place. Even the thought of Mother Lucia held little comfort. She couldn't live on the charity of the nuns.

Even if she had the money to go home, it was extremely doubtful if they would receive her again at Pentarn. She had done what was for them the one unforgivable thing, worse than Nicholas' running into debt, worse than the perpetual anxiety Daphne's extravagance had reduced them to.

She was far away now from the little Roman salotto with its stiff, ugly furniture. She was back in thought at Pentarn. She saw the grey, oblong-shaped rectory standing on the stark summit of the cliff, with the few sparse wind-distorted trees struggling to protect it. She saw the Cornish woods in early summer, with the flames of countless rhododendrons lending a fiery color to the scene. She saw suddenly a bank of rose-colored valerian that every year had been a glory of brightness on the way to the Abbey. And the close-growing, sturdy hedges of veronica with their stiff small purple plumes. And the ever-beautiful blue mystery of the Atlantic, with the blunt summit of the Island cutting its line in two. The thought of it all, coming just then when the future was shrouded with uncertainty, stirred her to a sudden sense of homesickness, almost too great to be borne. She wanted desperately to go home, to see friendly familiar faces round her, to hear kindly words.

If they would only let her go back she would cook and sweep and scrub for them as she had never done before. But they would never let her do so, when once they had learned she was a Catholic. She had cut herself off, irrevocably.

"If it were not for the funeral you should go to-night, Miss Finch. I intend to write to your mother to tell her how deceitful and untrustworthy

I have found you. You came between me and my child."

Madame Garroni had said it now; she had voiced the real reason of her sudden hostility. She could never forgive Ursula. She could hear Alda's shriek of "'Mees!' 'Mees!'" when she herself had approached her. Once she had dragged Alda forcibly from Ursula's arms.

Guido had remained for some time in complete silence, but in spite of his silence he had listened attentively to the conversation that had been taking place between his wife and Ursula. And as he listened his anger deepened. He was the grandson of a Sicilian woman, and the hot blood of Southern peoples ran in his veins. This white-faced girl had had the impertinence to oppose him—she who was little more than a servant in his house! It was she who had done all the mischief! Doubtless she had been persuaded to do it by his mother and Mario, but, in any case, she had lent herself to their intrigues. He would be accused of inconsistency for having a girl who was a Catholic convert to look after his children; and what would be said of him if in addition to this he accorded his child Catholic burial? Enslaved as he was, inextricably entangled by those tyrannical forces to which he had submitted, he saw the perilous position in which he was now placed. Everyone would know of the priest's visit to the house that morning. He had come in and gone away again quite openly. Alda had died as the child of strict Catholic parents might have died. He had heard those broken phrases uttered to Ursula, evincing a piety that was strong and hereditary within her. He had tried to stamp these things out of his home, but they were too strong for him. He remembered the crucifix he had seen in her tiny hands; he had not dared remove it. It was still

there, for the little frozen fingers had clasped it tightly. He had looked upon that symbol with horror. For a second it had seemed to reproach him, had brought back to his mind the unforgettable lessons he had received in his boyhood.

He would never forgive Ursula for being the means of bringing disgrace—as he termed it—upon his house. He would make an example of her. People should say, "Yes, it was the English governess' doing, he couldn't help himself. But he packed her off the moment he found out that she was secretly a Catholic!"

He sprang to his feet, and his dark face was swollen and purple with rage.

"You shall not stay here another hour!" he shouted furiously. He made a step toward her as if he intended to fling her out of the house there and then. "You shall leave my house this very night! Do you hear?" He was so angry that he could hardly articulate. "Take your trunk and go!"

Ursula had in the old days always been rendered a coward by anger. But to-night she scarcely felt any fear.

"Yes, that is far the best plan," said Madame Garroni. "Let her go away at once. I wish I had never brought her back with me. All that expense for such a short time. And to have my own child so influenced that she would hardly come near me. That is the worst of engaging people you know little or nothing about!"

"She has no place to go to," said Mario. "You can't turn her like a dog into the street so late. Why, it's nearly nine o'clock."

Madame Garroni paid no attention to him. She turned majestically to Ursula.

"I think you heard what my husband said, Miss Finch?" She pointed to the door. "You will leave

the house the moment your trunk is packed; and don't ever dare to come back. As for a character, you will have to go elsewhere for that."

"Yes, if she dares show her face here again I'll set the police on her track," stormed Garroni.

Ursula went out of the room. She held her head high; she was not going to show these people that she was wounded by their insults. Mario followed her.

"Where shall you go, 'Mees'? It will be so late by the time you are ready."

"I shall go to Mother Lucia. I know she will take me in."

"Would you like me to come with you?"

Ursula shook her head.

"No, you had better stay here. You have to-morrow, and the funeral to think of. Besides I shall be quite all right alone."

Ursula hastily packed her trunk. She wanted to go into the nursery to have one more look at the little dead child who had passed beyond all the difficulties and complications of life, an angel in its first innocence, but the door was locked. When she was ready she found Mario still standing in the hall, waiting for her. He carried her trunk downstairs for her, Ursula following with a little bag. It was the scantiness and poverty of her luggage that struck him so forcibly. Yet he had always known that she was very poor; she had had scarcely any money while his aunt was away. Not enough to pay for sufficient food. His anxiety was by no means allayed by her brave, bright look. She didn't know perhaps the difficulties that lay in front of her. Of course, the nuns would be kind, and she was in a very true sense suffering for her faith. But the future seemed indeterminate, obscure.

He fetched a cab for her. "Where shall I tell the man to go?"

His kindliness and help touched her, and made the tears come into her eyes.

"To the convent, please," said Ursula.

She drove away through the brilliantly lit autumn streets of Rome.

CHAPTER XXIV

URSULA was unacquainted with conventual hours and habits, and she had not realized that at nearly ten o'clock at night the big grim *portone* would be closed across the outer entrance to the convent, and that no porter would be on the watch for tardy visitors. She pulled the bell, at first timidly, and then again with more courage. There was no reply, and a third ring, more desperate than the two former, produced no more favorable results. It occurred to her then for the first time that the lay-Sisters had probably gone to bed. No provision was made for anyone calling so late; the Sisters only stayed up if some one were definitely expected.

All was dark within. There was no sign of life. With a courage born of desperation Ursula pulled the bell for the fourth time.

She could hear the reverberation of its hollow twang beating through the emptiness of the house, echoing down the bare passages, and through the carpetless rooms. A door on the right of the convent was pulled open, and a man's sleepy head was pushed forth.

"I am the concierge of the convent," he said, in rapid Italian; "it is too late for you to go there now. The door shuts at half-past seven and the nuns do not see anyone afterward. Come back to-morrow morning."

He shut the door again, impatient probably at being aroused from his slumbers.

Ursula's heart sank. She stood there in the narrow street, wondering what she should do next. She had very little money, for Madame Garroni had paid her nothing before she left, thinking it extremely im-

probable that Ursula would have recourse to the Questura to obtain what was owing to her.

What she had in her purse would, she hoped, be sufficient to pay for the cab and for a night's lodging somewhere. But where was she to go? Hotels were expensive, were indeed out of the question. She knew little about the *pensions* of Rome. Fear came over her for the first time. She had never been alone, quite alone, like this before. Not knowing where to go. In a city, too, that was still strange to her, so circumscribed had been her experience of it.

She stood there irresolutely. Overhead the sky was darkly blue, with the soft dusk of the South. It was sown brilliantly with stars, and as she looked up at them she was struck afresh by the wonderful groups they formed, the delicate patterns and shapes they delineated, drawn in diamond-like points of light. Then suddenly she thought of little Alda. The child had been very dear to her. Lately, even before her illness, she had sat up far into the night with her, soothing her, comforting her, telling her of our blessed Lord and His dear Mother, who loved all little children for His sake. Lessons that had helped the child to die, willingly, even gladly. What a long time ago her death seemed. Only this morning, and yet the day had been so full of sharp dramatic moments and crises that it seemed as if it had all happened centuries ago.

The cabman at this point briefly indicated his inability and also his passionate disinclination to remain there all night, or even for a moment longer.

"I don't know where to go," said Ursula, desperately. "Do you know of anyone who has a furnished room to let?"

He shook his head. Rome was, he knew, full at the time. And he did not see himself driving round

the city with a person who was obviously unable to make such an expedition worth his while.

"You'd better go to a hotel," he said. "It's easier to get into one. You'll find other people won't care to take you in so late."

"A *pension*—" suggested Ursula feebly.

"No, no; it's nearly half-past ten. You must go where there's a night porter."

"Very well. Take me, please, to a quiet small one. Not too dear."

She got into the cab again, and it clattered noisily over the cobbled streets of Rome, darting down incredibly narrow and crooked by-ways where it seemed as if there would never be space for it to pass. They came suddenly upon the Fountain of Trevi, looking splendid in the starlight. The pale, colossal figures looked enormous, and the great rush of water glimmered luminously in the dusk. There were lights there that illuminated the night, lights from the street-lamps, from the tall surrounding houses. A cool fresh wind blew into her face from across the fountain. Then they drove on.

Presently they stopped before a lighted entrance, in a busy street, where the trams were still going up and down, ringing their bells and cleaving the night with the ugly squeaking sound of their brakes. A motor was standing there, and two women in evening dress, with superb cloaks and large shawl-like fur stoles, emerged and went up the steps into the hotel, followed by a man. Ursula caught a glimpse of their uncovered dark heads.

One of the women turned, as Ursula descended from the cab, and went up the steps. She saw her face; it was one of those small, delicately drawn Italian ones, lit by dark eyes that were very beautiful.

For a moment Ursula stood there hesitatingly, a

shabby figure that looked out of place in the garishly decorated hotel vestibule. Then she went up to the concierge.

"Could—could I have a room here to-night, please?" she said.

The man, fair, Swiss-looking, stared at her with ill-bred astonishment. She did not resemble their usual clientele in appearance.

"You can ask in the bureau. The manager is there. But I think the rooms are all occupied."

Ursula went across to the bureau in the direction indicated. She was feeling very tired now, and dispirited. The emotions of the day had exhausted her. She had a dreadful fear that she would soon burst into tears. Supposing all the rooms were, as he had suggested, full? Supposing there were no place for her? She would have to go back into the street, to the already impatient cabman, and continue her search. She saw herself going from hotel to hotel, pleading for admittance. They would look at her shabby dress, her scant luggage, and ask themselves what she was doing, alone and friendless, in Rome at night. Perhaps, they would think she was escaping. She choked back a sob. Why had she not let Mario accompany her?

"I am very sorry; but we have no room—no room at all," said the glib voice of the manager, speaking like his colleague the concierge, with a strong German-Swiss accent. "We are quite—quite full," and he looked at her with a glance in which she read contempt. Contempt, perhaps, for her shabby clothes, her meek, timid manner.

Ursula turned away. In the sharp, white glare of the electric light she looked deathly pale. She stumbled a little. She must go back and tell the cabman she had been unsuccessful, and beg to be taken elsewhere. Perhaps he would refuse, already

he had given her to understand that she had detained him long enough. Then a voice that in its music, its familiar unforgotten magic, might have emanated from another sphere, struck across the silence.

"Kindly find a room for this lady at once. I know her—she is a friend of mine."

The manager's face was a study in rapid transformation. His scarcely veiled insolence gave place first to consternation and dismay, then to obsequious apology. Another moment, and he was reduced to abject humility.

"Pardon, monsieur. But monsieur knows the lateness of the hour, we have to be careful. But we would do anything to oblige an old client like yourself."

Ursula looked up into Humphrey Willmot's face. It did not even now seem strange to her that he should be there. Perhaps God had sent him. God had taken pity on her because she had suffered today for the first time in His service. Alda was dead, and she was homeless. The world was in ruins at her feet. And out of the ruins there had stepped Humphrey Willmot.

"Don't move, Miss Finch." He had dragged a chair toward her. "I'll pay your cab and see that they bring in your trunk. When I saw you get out just now I felt almost certain it was you."

She sat down, white, shaking, but so relieved that she felt she would have been content to die. Humphrey vanished for an instant, but speedily returned.

"Now show this lady up into her room. A small one, nothing expensive," he said, in a peremptory tone.

It was wonderful how quickly everyone obeyed him. Presently Ursula found herself in the elevator with him. They ascended story after story. At last

the car stopped, and they followed the manager down a long heated passage. He paused before a door at the end of it.

"I regret it is the only room we have unoccupied. It is very small."

"It will do perfectly," said Humphrey shortly. "Send the lady's trunk up at once, if you please."

They stood there, facing each other, waiting for the trunk to be brought. Then Humphrey made her sit down, he could see that she was tired and overstrained. Something had happened. He wished that she would tell him what it was.

"Poor Ursula," he said gently; "you know I always think of you as Ursula!"

His voice was tender, but it held, too, something of its old whimsical ironical quality.

"I don't know how to thank you," said Ursula, dully. She had a foolish, insensate, but quite defined longing to kneel at his feet.

"Then don't try to, please. To-morrow we'll have a long talk; and you shall tell me all that's happened to you since you left Pentarn." Yes, there was a story behind it all, and he wanted badly to know it. "Did you ever get a letter from me?"

"Oh, yes, thank you. It—it came just after I'd been very ill."

"Why didn't you write?"

"I—I didn't want you to know that I wasn't happy. I should have been obliged to say. You asked me to tell you."

He took her hand and held it lightly, caressingly, in his.

"Were you very unhappy?" he asked, and now his blue-grey eyes were fixed upon her face with a very strange expression in them, an expression she was wholly unable to analyze. Yet there was some-

thing in his face then that made her heart give a wild throb.

"Yes," she admitted, almost reluctantly.

"And the books?" he said. "Did you ever get them?"

She shook her head. "No, they never reached me."

"Never mind, I'll send you some more."

Two men brought Ursula's trunk into the room. She was almost ashamed that Humphrey should see how small and shabby it was. He would guess, perhaps, that it contained all her worldly belongings.

"Well, I suppose I must say good-night," he said cheerily; "*à demain* then."

"Good-night," said Ursula. "And thank you very much. I am more grateful—" She stopped. She was afraid of losing her self-control, of breaking down before him.

"Dear Miss Finch, I've done simply nothing at all!"

He turned away and left her, with that abruptness that she always remembered. Once it had hurt her, but she understood now that it did not in the least mean that he was bored. She had almost thought to-night that he had gone away in order to avoid saying something that he did not wish to say—something that perhaps clamored to be said.

When his footsteps had died away down the passage Ursula sank into the armchair, and put her hands up to her face to shield her eyes from the glare of the electric light. Her thoughts were so confused that she felt unable to concentrate them upon any single event of the day. There had been Alda's death, and that hurried journey of hers to fetch a priest before the child died. The anger of her employers, especially the furious anger of Guido, that held in it something of the rage of a

thwarted man. Their careless flinging of her out of doors at night. She saw herself standing hopelessly in the starlight outside the closed convent door, listening to the bell as it clanged eerily all through the silent house. Now she was listening to the careless insolence of the manager, telling her there was no room. And then across the bewildering darkness that seemed to be closing about her, she heard Humphrey Willmot's voice ring out like sudden music. She had not realized till then the long hunger of her heart for sight of him. She had so resolutely put all thought of him from her since she had left Pentarn, knowing that such thoughts could only weaken her, unfit her for the grim conflict of life. She had honestly tried to forget him. To think of him could only bring pain. And then to-night when her need was greatest he had stepped out of the shadows to help her, wise, friendly, kind, and even, as she believed, a little compassionate. Yes, he had seemed to-night more than ever wonderful, though remoter from her own sphere than one of those brightly shining stars.

CHAPTER XXV

URSULA'S night was short and disturbed, with restless dreams in which she imagined herself to be wandering alone along the Tiber, with all the doors of Rome shut against her. Once or twice she dreamed that Mario and Humphrey passed her in the darkness without recognizing her, and that when she opened her lips to call to them no sound came, and they vanished into the shadows. She awoke at last with a start, and looked at her watch. It was six o'clock. Time to get up. The Requiem Mass for little Alda was to be at eight, and first she must pack her things and leave the hotel. She rose, dressed herself, and went downstairs. Several people were about, preparing to catch an early train. A sleepy porter carried her trunk downstairs. She went to the bureau and asked for her bill. It was exorbitant, and she knew it; probably they had imagined that Humphrey—the length of whose purse was well-known in the hotel—would pay it. She remembered with a start that he must have paid the cab for her last night; she had forgotten about it in the confusion and emotion of the moment. A cab was called and she drove to the convent. This time the concierge took in her trunk, but he explained the Sisters were all at Mass. It was too early for her to see any of the nuns; they would be in church until eight o'clock. She told the man she would return later if she might leave her trunk there. He consented, and then Ursula walked away.

She had not eaten for many hours, and she felt a little weak and faint from her long fast. Still she walked on, and at last arrived at the church. Mario was already there, and the little coffin had been carried in and placed upon the high catafalque. Soon the priest entered and began the Mass. There were

no mourners present except herself and Mario. Old Caterina Garroni had been too ill to come, and the parents had driven straight to the Campo Santo to await the arrival of the funeral cortège. Presently Ursula and Mario knelt down side by side at the altar-rail to receive holy communion. When Mass was over and the corpse had been sprinkled with holy water and incense and the last absolution had been given, the coffin was borne out again. Mario alone with the priest followed it to the cemetery.

Ursula went into a shop that was close at hand and ordered some coffee and a roll. She was almost famished, for she had eaten very little during the past twenty-four hours. She felt a little light-headed, as she had done during her illness. But the food restored her, and she was able to walk back to the convent.

Mother Lucia received her very kindly. "But, of course, you must stay here, my dear child, until you are quite rested and have found another situation," she said, kissing her. "You shall have your old room; I will go and tell them to get it ready for you. Have you had anything to eat?"

"Yes, thank you," said Ursula. She followed the nun upstairs.

Yes, she was safe here. Even Humphrey could never find her. She felt that she could not bear to see him again. When he came down to-day he would perhaps inquire for her, only to find that she had vanished, leaving no trace of her whereabouts. It never occurred to Ursula that he could possibly suffer any anxiety on her account. Such a contingency as that would have been beyond her wildest imagining. She did not want to be a trouble to him, nor could she accept any more help from his hands. She did not wish to reveal to him the precise measure of her failure, her unsuccess, her present poverty.

As she thought of him, standing there in front of her as he had done last night, his blue-grey eyes resting upon her with a strange expression in them that she did not dare to try and analyze, the tears began to gather. She loved him. She had loved him all the time. It was only by a powerful effort of will that she had managed to banish him all these months from her thoughts. She loved him, as surely she could never love any one else, however long her life might be. But she did not want to think of him. She tried to turn her thoughts to little Alda. Yes, they must be there now, the Garronis and Mario, standing by an open grave on that beautiful hillside outside the gates of Rome, among the cypresses on this exquisite autumn morning, watching the little coffin being lowered into its grave. Yet, she felt scarcely any grief now at Alda's death. She had loved the little thing tenderly, but the child had died in her baptismal innocence; she was an angel in heaven to-day. If she had lived she might have lost, in those godless surroundings, the shining jewel of faith. She was safe to-day, splendidly safe.

In the afternoon she was sent for to come downstairs; a visitor had called to see her. She went down to the parlor near the entrance and found, as she expected, Mario sitting there. He rose as she came in.

First he told her about the funeral. It had been very painful there, in the Campo Santo, to see Garroni and his wife, the former angry and rebellious, the latter weeping bitterly. Neither of them had addressed a single word to him, and they had driven straight home after the ceremony. Mario had not since been back to the house. He dreaded seeing them under the circumstances, and he had arranged to stay with a friend for a few days.

Abruptly then he began to question her about her

doings since she had left the flat on the preceding night.

"You had no difficulty, I hope, about getting a room here?" he said.

She found she had a curious dislike to speaking of the events of last night to Mario.

"Yes, I could not get in. The door was shut," she said.

"Shut? Do you mean you couldn't stay here?"

"Yes—I had to go to a hotel for the night."

"Without trouble—without difficulty? I mean, had you enough?"

She hesitated. "At first it wasn't easy. They said there was no room. But I met a friend."

"I did not know you had any friends in Rome," said Mario. His curiosity was strongly aroused. "Who was this friend?"

"He is an Englishman. I knew him at Pentarn—my home in Cornwall. He was very kind; he told the manager to find a room for me at once. He insisted."

Mario felt a sharp twinge of jealousy.

"You were glad to see him again?" he said, with a sullen look in his dark eyes. Why had he not gone with her? Why had he not been there to proffer his assistance?

"I was very glad of his help," said Ursula, evasively.

"You will see him again?"

"No, I don't think so." Mario's close questioning was getting a little on her nerves. She wondered why he should care to know so many little unimportant details. "I left the hotel very early—I did not give them any address. And, of course, I did not see him again this morning."

Mario looked mollified. "You made me jealous," he said suddenly; "is not that absurd?"

"Very absurd," said Ursula, smiling.

There was a pause which Mario broke abruptly by saying:

"I wish I could tell you what I felt like after you had gone away last night. You looked so young, so helpless, so forlorn. If Rosina had been turned out of doors she could hardly have looked more helpless. I was angry with my uncle and aunt. We had a scene, and I told them they had behaved disgracefully—that I hoped you would go to the Questura. I think the idea frightened them a little. My aunt said, 'If she applies to me for her money she shall have it.' I said, 'What about to-night? What will she do to-night? You know she has nothing. When you went to the seaside you left her here to starve. She was ill and penniless and alone.' She did not answer a word—she could not."

Ursula did not speak. Something vehement in his tone startled her. He put out his hand and took hers, holding it as in a vice so that she could not release it.

"Look here," he said passionately, "I have learned to-day what I never knew before and that is that I love you, Ursula. You are beautiful and good, you have great courage. I have seen your tenderness with Alda and Rosina. The children loved you. I was afraid at first, because you were a Protestant. I used to think, 'Whatever she teaches those children she can never teach them the truths of our holy religion.' But God sent you the gift of faith, the one thing needful. I want you to marry me—I love you."

His dark and brilliant eyes searched her face, as if to win some response from her.

"No—no—" said Ursula. She released her hand from his grip. "I mean—I couldn't marry you. We have been great friends, I shall never for-

get your kindness. Without you I have sometimes felt that I could not go on. You mustn't think me ungrateful now."

"It is this Englishman you love?" he demanded, remorselessly.

"How can I love him?" She evaded the direct answer. "I have only seen him a few times in my life. He just happened to be there last night."

"I am certain that you love him. Just now when you spoke of him the very tone of your voice changed, the look in your eyes. It was that which made me jealous, which taught me that I love you. But perhaps he doesn't love you, and when he goes away you will think of me."

"He certainly does not love me," said Ursula, and her throat seemed to close on the words. "But it would be cruel not to tell you the truth. His going or coming will make no difference. I shall never think of you like that—only as a friend, a true kind friend, who helped me a great deal when—when things were difficult."

"And who would help you again, whenever you will let him. Always believe that, Ursula."

If she had never known love, the first sweet fervors of it thrilling across her utter unconsciousness, a thing that transformed the whole world so that it could never look the same again, she might have mistaken her sisterly liking for Mario for a deeper sentiment. Many women have married, and married happily, under a delusion of the kind. But she swiftly compared her own feeling for him with that which Humphrey's least word was able to evoke, and she saw that they were as different in degree as sunlight and moonlight.

Mario was silent now, and his young handsome face was wrapped in a deep and profound gloom. He did not quite believe Ursula when she gave him

to understand that she did not love this unknown man, and he felt that there must be a deeper attachment than she would acknowledge between herself and him. Confused, jealous, distrustful thoughts crowded his mind. Had she gone to that particular hotel, when the convent failed her, because she was aware of his presence there? Had she been seeing him all these weeks, in those rare moments of leisure she was able to snatch from her arduous, strenuous duties? Perhaps his very presence in Rome had been the secret source and spring of her so great courage, as well as of her calm acquiescence when Garroni in his anger had almost flung her out of his house. He could not believe it; he had always felt that the secret source of her strength had lain in those spiritual things which had laid violent hands about her since her coming to Rome.

The very fact that this unknown man was of her own race and country seemed to add fresh fuel to the flame of Mario's jealousy. For he felt keenly the barrier that must always exist between persons of different races; it is something so strong that it can at times wound the most adoring love by its sense of peculiar separation. He had felt the difference between his own outlook and Ursula's; he had felt the unlikeness that existed between her and the women of his own race. But it had not made him love her the less; it had in a sense added to her attraction, had endowed her with a touch of exquisite mystery.

He loved her very much; he swore to himself now that he would marry her, in defiance of Guido and Arabella who would oppose such a project with violence. He had a mad wish now to clasp her in his arms, to kiss her pale beautiful face.

For she *was* beautiful, this girl from the North, whom his aunt had made the slave and drudge of the whole household. He could see her now bending

over Alda's crib, looking like some pale Madonna, and in this attitude of wonderful watchful tenderness he could behold in her the potential mother of children. She was so full of gentleness and solicitude for others, yet she never seemed to think of herself at all, and she possessed, as he knew, an indomitable almost fiery courage. She had taught those two babies all she could of the old faith that to her was a new and wonderful revelation. It was undoubtedly through her influence that little Alda, the daughter of a renegade father, had been taught to die the death of a holy Catholic child, prayers on her lips, a crucifix in her hands.

"Ursula, Ursula," he said, with a break in his voice that sounded like a sob.

"You mustn't think of me, Mario. You know in your heart that I'm not the right wife for you. Marry some one of your own country. Those mixed marriages aren't always happy, there's so often something wanting, the perfect sympathy and understanding that some one of your own country can give you, almost unconsciously. Look at your uncle and aunt—he might have been so different if he had married a good Italian woman, and she would have been far happier living in a quiet unambitious way in Penzance."

"But ours wouldn't be a marriage like that. Ours would be a Catholic marriage, blessed by the Church. We should bring up our children from the first as you brought up Alda."

She shook her head, not permitting herself to believe that his words had touched her, and even weakened perhaps something of her determination.

"We shouldn't be happy. All the time you would know I wasn't caring for you as I ought to care."

No, she could never content herself with a second-best, never be satisfied with less than that very per-

fect, illuminating sentiment she had had for Humphrey Willmot. It was something that had spoiled for her all lesser, weaker things. Even now he seemed to be standing near her, and his words uttered last night rang anew in her ears:—

"Poor Ursula! You know I always think of you as Ursula."

Pityingly, because he knew that her life, whether at Pentarn or in Rome, must necessarily be a hard and penurious one, so unlike his own. But even last night with the measure of her apparent failure looming before her with such gigantic emphasis, she had found herself wanting to cry out and tell him that he need never pity her quite so much again. She had something now that was worth more than all the riches of this world, something of immeasurable, perdurable worth. And he would have understood; he knew too how precious were those spiritual things she had secured. Perhaps one day he too. . . .

Mario could see that her thoughts were far away. They were not unhappy thoughts for her face wore a calm and serene look. For the present he believed that it would be useless for him to say more. He rose to go.

"Good-by," he said, "do not, please, leave Rome without telling me. I shall care very much to hear where you are, what you are doing. You must not go quite away without saying a word, although I know you have not much reason to think well of any of us after the way you have been treated."

"You must not say that," she said quietly; "you, at least, have always been kind. I am very grateful to you. You have helped me."

She put her hand in his. Mario lifted it to his lips. Then he left her without another word.

As he went away he said to himself. "But, of course, I must see her again. She can't be so cruel

as to refuse to see me. Perhaps I spoke too suddenly to-day. But at least she knows now that I love her!"

Once he had felt that a marriage with her would be for him a misalliance. She had been little more than a servant in his uncle's house, doing hard menial tasks, cooking, scrubbing. But Englishwomen were different, they saw nothing degrading in work. And her sister had just married, so Arabella had informed him, into the English nobility. He had been considerably surprised when he had heard the news, only a few days ago, just before Alda's illness. There seemed such a wide gulf between Ursula, drudge of all work, and a sister who was the wife of a great and wealthy English *milord*. Why did her sister leave her thus in her poverty, supposing the story were true? He felt that in Italy, if indeed such a situation had been conceivable at all, the rich sister's first act would have been to release the poor one from servitude, and give her an apartment in her own palace where she would be free and independent.

His pride had suffered. Ursula had refused him, kindly, it must be said, but unhesitatingly. She had thought perhaps that he "wasn't good enough," that she might even make, as her sister had done, a brilliant ambitious marriage. But no, he was misjudging Ursula Finch, and he knew it. She was simple, unspoiled, pious, devoted to duty; she was utterly without worldly ambition. He admired her courage, the courage with which she had taught the children, fetched the priest, and borne herself in that critical hour of Garroni's wrath. In her lived the selfsame spirit that had actuated the early Christians whose tombs were in the Catacombs. You could picture her under torture wearing a serene detached expression, such as you can see on the faces of martyrs in

the old frescoes. A look of seeing beyond all that the world might hold for you of pain and obloquy. She might have been a St. Agnes or, better still, a St. Balbina. She had reminded him sometimes of Bernini's statue of that young indomitable girl-saint.

But he wanted her love. As he walked slowly away he became more and more aware of how greatly all his hopes and plans for the future had become centralized, so to speak, in his love for this girl with the small pale face and black hair, and dark serious eyes. Then the old jealousy stirred once more within him. Who was this friend of hers, this man she had known at Pentarn? How often had she seen him since she had been in Rome? Was it true that he didn't love her? Had the knowledge of his presence there given her that aspect of interior contentment which he had always attributed to a spiritual origin? For the second time that day he gave way to these bitter, distrustful thoughts of her.

But her face had changed so when she mentioned him! There had been that little trivial hesitation in her manner when she spoke of his having come to her assistance. And her eyes had shone like grey jewels under the black lashes that veiled them so. If this man were not blind and a fool he must surely know how beautiful Ursula Finch was.

CHAPTER XXVI

URSULA'S courage had not once failed her during the difficult twenty-four hours through which she had passed. She had had much to sustain her, and she had been aware, too, of a curious subdued excitement that in itself preserved her from despondency. But now that it was all over and she had time to think coldly of the future, she could not help feeling a profound anxiety that threatened to sap her courage.

She had quietly fled from Humphrey, filled with the determination to conceal herself from him. He had shown himself ready, nay eager, to come to her assistance, and in his solicitude there had been a touch of friendliness that bordered upon tenderness and which had for one moment seemed to fill her heart with the sudden hope that he truly cared for her. But of course that was absurd. He had always liked her in a good-humored, friendly, whimsical fashion of his own. He would never care for her in any deeper way. But his presence was always wont to evoke those wild unfounded hopes that shone brightly when he was there, and afterward weakened her when she had most need of strength. She saw the folly of indulging in such idle dreams, and yet to be with him for ten minutes, as she had been last night, had undone all her careful work of the past months when she had striven so resolutely to forget him, not to think of him.

It seemed so long ago now since she had heard the door of the Garronis' apartment shut upon her last night. It was something that had happened to her in another life. Madame Garroni would perhaps write and tell Mrs. Burton of the reason of

her abrupt dismissal. And inevitably they would hear about it at Pentarn. They would feel the disgrace very keenly. She had not thought of that aspect of the case before. A daughter of theirs to become a Catholic! A daughter of theirs to be dismissed at a moment's notice for deceitful conduct! It would be for them a second blow, coming so soon, too, after Nicholas' disgrace. They would perhaps say to themselves: "Ursula was always troublesome, we might have known she would never be any good. She had a comfortable home and a good salary, and she has thrown it all away! Who will ever want to employ her again?" Yes, that would be the verdict of Pentarn. What would they have said if they had seen her standing outside the convent-door last night, alone and homeless in the streets of Rome? They would not have pitied her, they would have blamed her bitterly. They would have said she had brought it on herself; she had never been one to be trusted. They would remember all her old shortcomings, her petty failures, her inability to reach to that high standard they had set before her.

All that had happened up till her meeting with Humphrey last night seemed now to belong to a remote, almost unreal epoch. That incident alone stood out in sharp unforgetable detail. The words he had said, the look in his eyes. She would always remember them. And even if he had known the whole truth he would certainly never have blamed her. She put the thought of him from her, and began once more to examine her present situation.

From no point of view could it be called reassuring. But for the kindly nuns with whom she had taken refuge she would have been still alone and homeless in Rome. Her hotel bill had swallowed up all her little store of lire. She could not return home, even if she had had the money to pay

for her journey. She felt now that she was irrevocably cut off from Pentarn. They had grown accustomed to her absence, and perhaps by this time they had even forgotten to miss her. They had never missed her as people miss a beloved child, but only because they had lacked the slight increase of comfort she had been able to bring to them. She ought to write—but what could she tell them? That her coming had been only one more disastrous failure, and that after little more than four months the Garronis had turned her out of the house without any salary because she had fetched the priest to their little girl when she lay dying? That she had done this because she had become a Catholic? Her father would blame her even more bitterly than the Garronis had done. For him it would furnish but another example of the depravity, the deceitfulness, of Catholics. It was unlikely that with such a story as that attached to her he would ever receive her at home again. And she wanted achingly at times to go back to Pentarn. To see the Atlantic again, all green and grey under the stormy spring sky; to watch it in the twilight with silver crests of foam dividing its shadows. To stand on the cliffs and hear the waves beating out their music at her feet, far, far below.

Yes, she had failed, and she faced the fact now with a kind of forlorn and weary courage. But her conscience told her that she had done well, and that if she could go back and retrace any of her steps she would not change anything. While it could not remedy anything of her disastrous situation, this knowledge could at least bring her a kind of passionate consolation.

And Humphrey, if he knew all, he would surely not blame her. She would at least have liked him to know the true facts of the case instead of the

garbled version that would reach Pentarn through Mrs. Burton. They would all hear sooner or later. They would all know that she—the rector's daughter—had been dismissed. There was always shame in that. Sent away at a moment's notice without a character—yes, it had happened sometimes to the Pentarn girls who had gone away to be servants, and always a little shame had attached itself to them afterward. It wasn't easy for them to make a second venture. People looked askance at girls who had suffered such dismissal. She began to be sorry for them at home; to wish they could have been spared the knowledge. It couldn't hurt Daphne now, though. She must be safely married by this time. Her wedding had been fixed for last Monday. Perhaps to-morrow she would get letters telling her about it.

Mother Lucia was extremely kind to her. Seeing that the girl was thoroughly worn out and overwrought, she persuaded her to spend a whole day in bed to get completely rested. In the meantime she promised to let her know if she heard of anything for her. Often people came to her asking her to recommend reliable English governesses for their children. She was quite sure they would soon hear of something. She did not tell Ursula that she had received a visit from Mario one morning. The young man had come to plead his cause with her, and Mother Lucia had liked his appearance and obvious sincerity well enough to wish him success. It would indeed, she felt, be a perfect solution to the problem of the hour. Mario was quite well off, and he had apparently loved Ursula almost from the first day of her coming to Rome. All that he had seen of her, and especially of her devotion to the children, had only served to confirm his first favorable impression of her. But, of course, he would

never have dreamed of marrying her had she remained a Protestant. He had never thought she would be converted so swiftly. One glimpse of Catholicism had sufficed to convert her, to destroy all the teaching she had known at home. Further he assured Mother Lucia, there would be no need to wait. They could be married as soon as she had procured the necessary documents from England. She did not care for him as yet, it was true, but she would learn to care.

Mother Lucia listened to his long statement with a calm attention that was very gratifying. She said little, but Mario had a strong feeling that she would not withhold her support.

"At present I must tell you," she said at last, "Ursula's one idea is to find a situation away from Rome. The Princess Cantarelli is looking for an Englishwoman to take charge of her elder child, and I have written to her about Ursula. I haven't told her yet for fear of a disappointment, but it would be an excellent thing for her. The Princess lives at Mintella, in Tuscany, she was educated in England and is a very pious Catholic. I feel that it would be a happy and safe home for Ursula."

"Oh, don't send her to Tuscany!" said Mario, in dismay. "Don't let her go away from Rome. I might never see her again."

"I'm afraid I can't make any promises. If the Princess' reply is favorable I shall send Ursula to see her to-morrow evening."

"It is monstrous that she should have to earn her own living like this!" said Mario, warmly. "Do you know that her sister has just married an immensely wealthy man—an old English milord, twice her own age? She ought not to leave Miss Finch to be a dependent drudge in Italy, wasting all her youth!"

Ursula had never mentioned Daphne's marriage to Mother Lucia. It affected her so little that it had never occurred to her to do so, or indeed to discuss it with anyone. She had even let Madame Garroni discover it for herself. The news was therefore a complete surprise to Mother Lucia, and like Mario she wondered why Ursula was still allowed to remain so forlorn and poor and friendless in Rome. Perhaps her conversion had cut her off from her own people, as was so often still unhappily the case. She had never thought of Ursula as having any rich or influential relations. The affair became mysterious. Why had the girl ever accepted such a wretched position as the one she had occupied in the Garronis' household? She had been half nurse, half slave. A girl of her birth and education could surely have found more profitable and attractive employment elsewhere. She must question her on the point, and find out why she had ever been induced to leave her home.

And then to complicate the matter still further there was this young man keenly desirous of marrying her. He had been an inmate of that very household, had seen Ursula at her tasks, had admired her courage and devotion, and had fallen in love with her. She thought Ursula might do worse for herself than accept such a fate.

"But if—as you say—she doesn't care for you, it would perhaps be best that she should go quite away," she said.

"It would be very hard on me," he answered.

"Still if she found employment in Rome you would not ever see her, it would be indiscreet, even imprudent, of you to try to do so."

"Anyhow, I hope she won't go too far away."

With that he took his leave, a little dissatisfied and feeling as if Ursula were slipping out of his reach.

He had hoped to see her that day, but Mother Lucia had assured him that it would be impossible, for Ursula was resting after all the fatigue and emotion of the events she had just passed through. He didn't want her to leave Rome, and if he had been able to see her he would have urged her very strongly to remain there. Of course, she had been vilely treated by his uncle and aunt, perhaps that had disgusted her with the place and made her long to go away.

It was miserable at home now. Since the funeral Arabella had taken to her bed. There was no servant, and his grandmother had to manage as best she could, for no help was forthcoming from Madame Garroni who lay there bewailing her fate and weeping. He and Guido took all their meals at a restaurant. It was an uncomfortable state of things. Ursula had hardly been missed so much at Pentarn as she was missed now in the Garronis' flat.

CHAPTER XXVII

On the following morning Mother Lucia came into Ursula's room and found her sitting at her table, writing.

The letter was for her mother. It was a difficult one to write, and she was haunted by a dismal sense of the effect it would produce when it reached Pentarn. Still, delay would be worse than useless. Already, in all probability, Madame Garroni would have written to Mrs. Burton, giving her her own version of the story, and thus would have got her oar in first. The news when it did arrive would spread like wildfire to Pentarn. Ursula could picture the consternation and dismay that would reign at the rectory.

"I have had a letter from Princess Cantarelli," said Mother Lucia; "she wishes to see you at five o'clock this afternoon. This is her address." She put a slip of paper into Ursula's hand.

The girl glanced at it and her face fell. The Princess was staying at the same hotel where she herself had spent the night after leaving the Garronis. It was where Humphrey Willmot was staying. By going there she would run the risk of meeting him. She remembered, as in a flash, the two beautiful women with whom he had entered the lounge. She had noticed them both, but especially the younger one who looked about eighteen and was of remarkable beauty, and evidently of Italian birth. Perhaps the Princess would prove to be one of them.

"Oh, I can't go there! I would rather not go to that hotel," she exclaimed impulsively.

Her very obvious nervous distress struck Mother Lucia forcibly, especially after all that Mario had said.

"But, my dear child, what reason can you possibly have for not wishing to go there?"

Ursula's face flushed.

"You see it is the same hotel where I spent the night when the Garronis turned me out."

"But you were able to pay them, I hope?" said Mother Lucia.

"Oh yes, I was just able to do that. But I met someone I knew there, someone who used to live near my home at Pentarn."

Mother Lucia felt that the mystery was deepening. It was the first time that Ursula had not been perfectly frank and simple with her. She said very kindly:

"And is there any real reason why you should wish to avoid this person?"

"No real reason, except that I'd rather—I'd much rather—not see him again."

She had so hoped that in a few days she might leave Rome quietly with the Princess, and thus be freed from all fear of meeting Humphrey. It was the worst of luck that she should be asked to go and interview someone at that particular hotel.

And yet there was a hunger in her heart that cried out fiercely to be satisfied. If she could only see him once more, only hear his voice! It was strange that her reason should so strongly oppose such a meeting.

Mother Lucia formed a resolution to penetrate to the truth of the matter. She was going to recommend Ursula as a suitable person to have the care of little children, and if there were any secret, dishonorable or otherwise, in her life, she had a right to know it.

For, as Mario had said, it was strange that she should be in Rome and in such straits, dependent too upon her own exertions, when her sister was such a rich and important person.

"Had this person anything to do with your leaving England?" she asked at last.

"Yes—no—yes, I think he had."

"Won't you tell me about it, Ursula?" said Mother Lucia.

She liked the girl, and took a deep interest in her. She wished, too, to befriend her, to find her a good home where she would be happy.

"Oh, there is very little to tell," said Ursula. "He was staying with his parents near my home last spring. His mother liked Daphne—that is my sister, she wasn't married then—and asked her to stay with them in London. It was thought, you see, that perhaps he might fall in love with Daphne and marry her. They wanted him to marry—his parents, I mean. But I don't think he ever thought of Daphne, and now she has just married Lord Cheam. Sometimes I used to meet Mr. Willmot on the cliffs." She raised her frank dark eyes to Mother Lucia's. "When they knew about it they scolded me—they forbade me to go beyond the garden without leave. He didn't know that, of course." After all what a poor little skeleton-story hers was, utterly destitute of dramatic beautiful moments or thrilling interludes. "Daphne didn't like it, and I am sure that was why they all changed their minds suddenly and sent me abroad with Madame Garroni. She was staying with her sister, Mrs. Burton, at Pentarn, and she asked me to come here with her as a nursery-governess; she never told me I should have to do the work of a general servant."

"And this man—was he in love with you?"

"Oh, no—no!" There was an eagerness to refute the idea which struck Mother Lucia at the time as a little exaggerated. "Why, we hardly knew each other. And in any case he would never have looked at me!"

Mother Lucia gave something like a sigh of relief.

After all it was the story of a sister's selfishness, and she wondered if Lady Cheam would try to make amends to Ursula now for the harsh treatment of the past. They had exiled her because she was in their way, and they had taken apparently no trouble to safeguard her interests, to ascertain that she would be properly treated by the people who had engaged her.

Only one thing now needed explanation, and that was the reason for her obviously sincere desire not to meet this man again; this man who all unconsciously had played so important a part in the shaping of her life.

"And what is he doing now in Rome?"

"I don't know, except that he said once he often came here in the winter. I saw him in the lounge of the hotel; he had just come in with two ladies. He was kind when the manager said that there was no room for me, he insisted upon his finding me one. He told him that I was a friend of his. But I did not see him again after that night, for I left so early in the morning to go to little Alda's funeral."

"Is he a Catholic?" Mother Lucia asked. There were still points in the little history that perplexed and puzzled her.

"No, but he was the first person I ever knew to praise the Catholic religion to me; he said he was sorry there had ever been the Reformation in England. Since I have become a Catholic I have never forgotten to pray for him."

Mother Lucia had now come to the conclusion that the mystery was only the most innocent and commonplace little love-story. But it was obvious to her that this man whom Ursula had known at Pentarn and on whose account she had been banished was the one who stood in the way of the realization of Mario's hopes.

"I think you had better go and see the Princess

all the same, Ursula. Even if you do meet this old friend of yours it cannot matter, but I don't suppose you'll come across him. The hotel is large and always crowded. You are going there on business, and you will come away at once after your interview."

"Very well," said Ursula reluctantly, "I will go."

It was almost dark as she passed through the streets of Rome that evening. Dusk had come prematurely, for there had been a heavy shower of rain, reducing the cobbled stones to a condition of perilous and greasy slipperiness. Overhead dark storm-clouds were traveling across the sky in threatening squadrons. The cabmen had put up their huge gingham umbrellas which gave such a top-heavy effect to their vehicles. But the lights shone brilliantly, and there was the customary evening stir. People were pouring into the churches for Benediction. Ursula caught glimpses of daintily-dressed women, leaning back in sumptuous motors. The great column in the Piazza Colonna reared itself majestically in dark silhouette against the sky. She crossed the Corso, and soon reached the door of the hotel.

She gave her name to the concierge who sent it up at once to the Princess. After a short delay Ursula was taken up in the elevator to her private sitting-room.

The Princess came from the north of Italy, and she was very fair, almost as fair as Daphne, but her skin though white and flawless had that peculiar duskiness which accompanies fair hair in the south. Her pale golden hair was dressed with a careful simplicity that suited her round, rather innocent, small face. She was pretty and slender and exquisitely dressed.

"I think I saw you the other night, Miss Finch," she said. She spoke English with perfect fluency and

with very slight trace of any foreign accent. "You were here—were you not?—when I came in with Mr. Willmot, and my friend Donna Ermelinda Caffari."

Donna Ermelinda! That then was the name of the beautiful dark girl whose eyes had momentarily rested upon the shabby distressed figure of Ursula Finch!

"Yes," she said, "Mr. Willmot kindly helped me. I was in great difficulty, as perhaps Mother Lucia told you. The people I was with turned me out because I had fetched the priest when their little girl lay dying. And it was late; when I got to the convent it was closed, and the cabman brought me here."

"Poor child," said the Princess, kindly. She looked at Ursula and saw how really pretty she was, despite her shabby, unfashionable raiment, her worn shoes and gloves. She had a charming expression too, young, frank, innocent, and her eyes were fearless and courageous. But she was far too young, and still too much of the inexperienced trusting child, to be "on her own" in a great city.

"It was quite brave of you to do what you did, and this man if he ever repents and comes to his right senses will be the first to thank you for what you did. But you are very young, and I imagine you have never been about alone before. One does not know quite what to do, does one?"

She knew much more about her than even Ursula suspected, for Mother Lucia had given her a pretty succinct account of her adventures with the Garroni family, and it had made her feel indignant with them, especially when she recognized her as the girl to whose assistance Humphrey Willmot had gone the other night. Well, he would be surprised to learn that she had discovered the whereabouts of his little

protégée, knowing that he had evinced a certain anxiety on the subject.

She asked Ursula a few questions, respecting her people, her education and her abilities. But she had taken a fancy to her, and had already secretly determined to engage her. She liked her soft way of speaking, her grave pretty manners.

"I think you will suit me perfectly," she said, when Ursula had answered her questions. "And since Mother Lucia can recommend you, and as Mr. Willmot knows your people in England I shall feel that I know quite enough about you. For the rest you will have a good home with us. You will have the care of my little girl, she is just seven. You will give her her first lessons, she is a young monkey and so far has not learned anything at all. My baby boy is still in the nursery, he isn't quite three, so for the present you won't have anything to do with him. I am sure that you understand children and that you will be kind to my little Maria. I want her to learn to speak English while she is still quite a little child. Can you be ready to come with me quite soon, Miss Finch? I am tired of being in Rome, and I should like to start on Tuesday. To-day is Saturday—will that be too soon for you?"

"Oh no, I shall be perfectly ready! I would come to-morrow—" said Ursula, joyfully.

Her pleasure was so real, so sincerely expressed, that the Princess smiled. She rose and went to her writing-table.

"Your salary will be two hundred lire a month," she said, "at any rate to begin with. I will give you one month in advance as you may wish to get yourself some winter things. Our climate is cold in winter, you will feel the difference after Rome. And you will have very little opportunity of buying anything when once we are there. We are so far

from Florence that we don't often go in." She put a little roll of notes into Ursula's hand.

"Oh, thank you, thank you," she said. "It is very kind of you to think of it."

She had been wondering how she could possibly procure some new shoes. Her own were quite worn out, they had not been very new when she left Pentarn. A warm winter coat was also highly necessary. And surely, too, there would be enough to repay the nuns for their hospitality, and to send something home to her mother.

She had never possessed such a large sum before, and a sudden scruple about taking it seized her.

"I don't think I'm worth such a large salary," she said. "I had only a little over six hundred lire a year when I was with Madame Garroni."

"I am giving you what I always give," said the Princess.

"I have so little experience," said Ursula.

The Princess smiled.

"Have you known Mr. Willmot a long time?" she asked, changing the subject.

She had been a little astonished at the prompt manner in which Humphrey had gone to the assistance of little Miss Finch the other night. She was such a different type from the dainty, charming, sophisticated women who usually attracted him. She was less surprised now that she had been talking to her for a little time. She found something very fresh and attractive about Ursula.

"Not very long. Last spring his parents took the Abbey which is near my home at Pentarn."

"You are a convert, aren't you? How long have you been a Catholic?"

"Nearly two months," said Ursula.

"Only two months? What do your people say?"

"I've only just written to tell them. They won't

like it; you see, my father is a clergyman, he is the rector of Pentarn."

The Princess was devout, and conversions interested her. As long as they continued, despite the opposition of relations and friends, despite, too, the petty persecutions that a more tolerant world still permits itself to bestow, they afforded glimpses of that ancient spirit that had characterized the early Christians. There were still inheritances to be lost, real sacrifices to be made, for the faith. Loss of position, of money, of profession, these things could still happen. And conversions, she had been told, were becoming every day more frequent in England.

"Is your father High Church or Low Church?" she inquired, for she had been in England and had heard these differences discussed.

"Very Low Church, madame. He dislikes the Catholic religion very much. He can't bear the High Church teaching either."

"That is so wonderful. All sorts of men teaching all sorts of doctrine. I'm told there's only one thing they all have in common and that is a dislike of the Pope!"

Ursula knew little enough about the Church of England except what she had seen of it in Pentarn. She knew what her father taught and what presumably he believed. It was quite simple, and he could to his own satisfaction, if not always to that of his hearers, find proofs for what he taught in the Bible, and he was accustomed to quote passages from it in support of his beliefs. He disliked High Church practices when his attention was drawn to them, and was hardly on speaking terms with his fellow-clergyman at St. Faith's because he had advertised for a "Catholic curate with six points." Mr. Finch held two services every Sunday. Once a month he had a Communion Service at eight o'clock, and once

also after the morning service. He preached twice on Sundays, and considered himself a hard-worked underpaid man. A parish priest, on half the stipend, with his nights perpetually broken by sick-calls, and his long hours of work in the confessional, might have considered Mr. Finch's duties almost nominal.

"Your sister is Lady Cheam, is she not?"

"Yes," said Ursula; "she was married the other day."

"I think I used to meet her husband *dans le temps*. He must be getting on in years."

"Yes, he is years and years older than Daphne."

"She is older than you, I suppose?"

"Yes, about two years. She is nearly twenty-five."

"Mr. Willmot told me she was very lovely."

"Yes," assented Ursula.

"I wonder why you didn't go home when those people turned you out?" said the Princess. "Don't you think they would have received you?"

"I could not be sure. But in any case it would have been out of the question. I had no money, and the journey costs a great deal. We are very poor—"

"But Lord Cheam is very rich," said the Princess.

"Daphne wouldn't think of sending me money," said Ursula, "she always wants so much. And up till now she has never had enough. I only hope she will sometimes remember to send my mother some."

They talked for a little longer, and then the Princess gave her some directions about the journey. She was to meet her at the station on Tuesday morning, and they would travel back to Tuscany together.

"I am sure I hope you will be happy with us," said the Princess as she said good-by to her. When Ursula had gone she thought to herself:

"Poor little girl, and she's such a child too! She looks as if she badly needed someone to be kind to her."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE Princess had invited Humphrey to dine with her that night at the Grand Hotel. They had hardly taken their seats at the small table she had engaged, when she said:

"You will be interested to hear that I have discovered the whereabouts of the little girl you came to the rescue of the other night!" Woman-like she regarded him with some curiosity as she spoke, to watch the effect of her words upon him.

"Do you mean little Ursula Finch?" he said. "Why, where is she? And how did you find her? They assured me at the hotel that she had gone away quite early without leaving any address."

His indolent satirical face betrayed only a faint surprise.

"It was quite by chance," she informed him. "You know I wrote to Mother Lucia begging her to recommend a nursery-governess for my little Maria, an English one if possible. And she sent Miss Finch to me. The girl had taken refuge there—it seems she knew them. Of course, I recognized her the moment she came into the room. By the way, she is really pretty. You don't notice it at first, and then afterward you think you must have been extraordinarily stupid not to have done so."

"Do you?" He was smiling now. "But perhaps I noticed it at first, it always seemed to me quite apparent."

"Yes, perhaps a man would. It's a charming little face. I've engaged her."

It was indeed a curious coincidence that Mother Lucia should have sent this very girl to her, in reply to her request for a trustworthy and well-educated

Englishwoman accustomed to the care of children. And the Princess had taken a sudden strong liking to the girl. She felt that if she remained with her she might become a life-long friend of the family, as women in her position so often do. When she had said good-by to her that evening she had resolved to find out all she could about her from Humphrey Willmot.

For, of course, behind it she felt that there must be some little romance, some quite innocent mystery.

"What I don't understand," she told him when they were half-way through dinner, "is why she should be here at all and so poor, and in such a dependent position, when her sister has married old Cheam who is rolling in money."

"The reason is perfectly simple," said Humphrey. "Daphne Cheam is the most absolutely selfish woman I have ever met. She cares for no one but herself. She would not mind in the least if her sister starved to death if she herself had all the food and dresses and diamonds and motors that she wanted. Her selfishness is so complete, so natural, so undisguised, that one really cannot help admiring it sometimes!"

"It is very hard on this one, though. In her last place she seems to have done all the cooking and house-work, as well as looking after the children, for little more than six hundred lire a year."

"I always advised her not to go there," said Humphrey warmly. "I never could understand why she went. But it seems her people insisted, and really she was such a little slave at home one felt it could hardly be an exchange for the worse."

"Perhaps they had some reason for wishing to get rid of her," suggested the Princess.

"I thought of that too. But what reason could there have been? She was so useful to them—did the work of two servants—I should have thought they would have wanted to keep her at all costs."

"Then you think there was no particular reason for her to come abroad with such very undesirable people?"

She was questioning him delicately, and Humphrey, aware of the fact, was a little on his guard.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Well, the Finches are as poor as the proverbial church mice. And Miss Daphne must have worn such revenues as there were upon her fair shoulders. This one had the opportunity of earning her own living, and they insisted upon her taking it. I remember they refused at first, and then changed their minds and insisted upon her going. I don't know if she had done anything to displease them, but I don't see how she could have done so. She hadn't a thought except how she could best get through her work. She was a hard-worked little drudge, but her going must have made one less mouth to feed."

"Well, she was a slave and a drudge at this Madame Garroni's. And then to be turned into the street, at night too! It was abominable."

"Turned into the street!" His fair face was flushed with indignation. "I never knew that. But of course she hadn't time the other night to explain to me exactly what had happened. And I was afraid to ask her, she was on the verge of tears, poor child. She'd come to the end of her tether, it would have only been cruel. Do you really mean she didn't leave them of her own accord?"

"Indeed I do. But perhaps you have not heard that she is a convert. She tells me that she's been a Catholic about two months. I don't know what brought it about, I didn't like to ask. But this Garroni is a violent Freemason and she fetched the priest when his little girl was dying, and he lost his temper and turned her out that night. At least that's what Mother Lucia told me. Miss Finch seemed to think there would be a difficulty about her going

home now, as her father is a clergyman and dislikes the Catholic religion very much."

"He does indeed," said Humphrey dryly. "I heard him preach against it once."

His astonishment was very great. Ursula had indeed cut the ground from beneath her feet, with a fine, a reckless courage that he could not help admiring. So she had succumbed, had she, to the spiritual enchantment of Rome? Yet, how natural it was that she should have done so. He remembered her bewildered joy when she first read Crashaw. She had said that he made of religion a different thing. She was of a highly impressionable, imaginative type, and Rome must have made an almost passionate appeal to her. And she must quite deliberately have counted the cost. Such home as she had—that narrow oblong stone rectory, lying on the blunt summit of the Cornish cliff, within sight and sound of the Atlantic—would be irrevocably closed to her now. She was penniless, and the thought of the future had not frightened her. When he had seen her and taken pity on her the other night, she must have been alone and perfectly friendless in Rome. That was the reason, perhaps, of her passionate gratitude. But he remembered now almost with anguish the calm face, the fearless and steady shining of her eyes that had never seemed to him so beautiful before, the little tremor in her voice as she thanked him, which was the only indication she had given of any extraordinary emotion. And the next morning when he inquired for her he found that she had paid her bill and gone, leaving no address. It was by the merest chance he had heard of her again. Now he had a stronger wish than ever to see her, to hear the poignant little story from her own lips.

He glanced round the splendid, sumptuous, and glittering restaurant. From their table they could command a view of the whole room, which to-night

was crowded to overflowing. There were men and women of many nationalities present, languid diplomats with attentive observant eyes; beautiful women dressed in the latest eccentricities of fashion; Italian officers in resplendent uniforms; a few notabilities from various European capitals; writers and artists of world-wide reputation. A very celebrated London physician was to be seen there dining with the son of a great Roman house. Americans with calm faces discussed the latest pronouncements of their President. The dinner was perfectly cooked and served. The murmur of conversation, of laughter, filled the room. But Humphrey scarcely observed any of these details. His thoughts were full of Ursula Finch. He admired her the more because she had done what he himself had not had the courage to do. And she stood to lose everything by the step. Brave, brave little girl. . . .

"I am glad to know she will be with you," he said suddenly, turning to his companion. "I'm sure you will be very kind to her, that she'll be happier with you than she's ever been before." He stopped short. After all did he want Ursula to go with the Princess? He had so looked forward to seeing her again.

"You must come and pay us a visit and judge for yourself," said the Princess. "We shall be delighted if you will stay with us. Come next month. November is quite a charming month with us if it doesn't rain too much."

"I shall be delighted to come," said Humphrey. "I want to see my little friend Maria again."

"I have my own chapel now. But, of course, that isn't an attraction to you!"

"To tell you the truth I'm not sure that it isn't beginning to be!" he was surprised into saying.

"Are you going to convert yourself?" she inquired.

"I couldn't even be sure of that!"

"I used to have hopes of you once. But now I

confess I have rather given up thinking of it. You have disappointed me so often."

"Have I? I'm sorry for that! You must take me seriously in hand." He smiled, but there was something of discontent in his smile, a subtle sadness. "This little girl has done, you see, what I've never had the courage to do. I used to talk to her about religion at Pentarn—she's just the sort of sympathetic person one rather easily talks intimately to. She knew absolutely nothing then of the Catholic faith, except the few prejudices her father had taught her. I remember her telling me I was the first person who had ever praised the Catholic Church in her hearing."

"It seems then that you have actually helped to make a conversion," she said, with a touch of satire. "You must allow me to congratulate you, especially as it has been of such service to myself. But the fact that she is Lady Cheam's sister rather annoys me. It makes me feel as if Miss Finch would be in a false position doing nurse to my little Maria."

"My dear Princess, she's worth fifty Lady Cheams," he told her with considerable emphasis.

"Well, in any case, I hope you will come and see how she is getting on. And if by then you want any instruction we have a charming chaplain. He is an old man, but very holy and full of zeal."

"Oh, now you are making me afraid to come!" said Humphrey lightly; "you are showing me rather too much of the net!"

Still he intended to go, if only to assure himself that Ursula was happy in her new surroundings. At any rate he could comfort himself with the thought that she would be kindly treated, that she would have a good home. The Princess would probably make a friend of her; she had led a lonely life in her old Tuscan villa since the death of her husband nearly three years ago. He wondered why, when

everything about the scheme seemed so perfect, he should have this odd dislike to picturing Ursula in a dependent position. But he refused to examine this dislike too closely. There was a reason for it, but he did not wish to think of it. He had made a decision at Pentarn, and he wasn't going to allow circumstances to make him go back upon it. Yet the sight of her, forlorn and alone the other night, had gone very near to destroying that deliberate prudence of his.

"You know I am a very impulsive woman," continued the Princess, breaking in upon his thoughts, "and I took such a great liking to her, that I am quite glad you know her and all about her. It makes me feel I haven't done an imprudent thing to engage a girl just because she has a pretty face and nice ways."

"I'm delighted then to have been of service to her and to you," he said gravely. "The Finch family are all that is most respectable. My mother took an enormous fancy to Lady Cheam before her marriage. She stayed with us in London and in Scotland, and it was there that her engagement took place."

"And you—I take it—you did not care much for Lady Cheam?"

She wondered if he had been as indifferent as he pretended to be toward Daphne Finch.

"No," he replied, "but I was on my guard. I labeled her dangerous, you know." He laughed.

"But do not label little Miss Finch dangerous, too," she implored, with mock earnestness.

Immediately he grew grave again.

"If I did," he answered, "it would be for quite another reason."

She did not venture to ask him exactly what he meant by this ambiguous statement.

CHAPTER XXIX

In those first weeks Ursula spent in the rambling old Tuscan villa that looked down upon Florence from its lofty position in a "gash of the wind-grieved Apennine" she used to wonder if life could ever hold for her happier or more peaceful days. It was like suddenly entering a calm harbor after many weeks spent upon a rough and storm-tossed sea.

The place was indeed a home of ancient peace. For the first time almost within her remembrance Ursula did not go to bed, worn out and exhausted, with the knowledge that the few hours of rest would be insufficient to renew her strength in such measure as to enable her to cope adequately with the morrow's tasks. Indeed, her work was of the lightest kind, and she sometimes had a scruple about receiving so much and giving so little in return. She slept alone, for little Maria had a room adjoining her mother's and was dressed by the nurse, so Ursula had nothing to do for her until she fetched her at eight o'clock to take her down to Mass in the chapel. There the whole household assembled, as well as many of the peasants who worked on the estate. It was a small, old building, the ceiling painted with groups of saints and angels in the Baroque style, and the altar a beautiful one of inlaid marble. There was a picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Succor, which was said to be miraculous, and it was entirely surrounded by clusters of votive offerings, silver and gold hearts, medals, rosaries and other gifts, presented in gratitude for graces obtained.

After Mass Ursula breakfasted with little Maria, and during the morning she gave her simple lessons and took her out for a walk. Then came the mid-

day meal which they had with the Princess, and afterward Ursula had two hours of perfectly free time while her small charge took her siesta. Another walk, or perhaps a long drive with the Princess in her motor, followed by tea on their return, filled up the rest of the afternoon. Maria generally spent an hour with her mother before dinner, which was served at seven on the child's account. Maria went to bed soon after eight, and Ursula had the rest of the evening to herself to spend as she chose.

The Princess was a great reader, and her husband had always gratified her taste for books. There was a fine old library, and Ursula could borrow any books she liked. She had ample opportunities for reading, and she found many English books there which she devoured eagerly. Conscientiously she prepared little Maria's lessons beforehand. Already she had made friends with her, and with the fat three-year-old Luigi or Gigi as he was commonly called. Everyone in the house from the Princess downward was kind to her. After her life in Rome she felt as if she had suddenly been transported into paradise. She was almost afraid to look forward, for fear something should happen to turn her adrift once more.

Both her parents had written to her, angry letters in which she was told that she must never expect to be allowed to live at home again. She would have to earn her living and to be dependent on her own exertions. They could not have her at Pentarn, the disgrace would be too great, and they were afraid that she might contaminate Ruth. Besides, if they were to receive her, it would look as if they were countenancing and condoning her deplorable action. It was useless to expect any comfort from their children, always excepting Daphne. She was the only one who had responded to their careful upbring-

ing. They might have known, Mrs. Finch had added, that Ursula would bring trouble and sorrow upon them. She had always been the obstinate self-willed one of the family. They were horrified too, as indeed she had expected them to be, about the reason for her abrupt dismissal. To think that a daughter of theirs, brought up as she had been to know and hate the Roman Catholic Church, should have been perverted so quickly and so thoroughly that she could have lent herself to such a course, in defiance of the parents' wishes, and utterly without compassion for their sorrow. They could hardly believe it, but Mrs. Burton had driven over to relate the whole history to them, and to assure them that Madame Garroni had had no choice but to dismiss their daughter summarily. There was a suggestion, too, that she had carried on a clandestine love-affair with young Mario, the nephew of Guido Garroni. Mrs. Finch wrote that she would have found it hard to believe that, if it had not been for Ursula's very unsatisfactory conduct just before she left home.

Ursula shed a few tears over the letter. She had so longed to save up enough money to go home, and see Ruth again and hear news of Nicholas, who was now never mentioned in any letters from Pentarn. But some day she hoped to put by enough to enable Ruth to come to her. They would settle down in some city, in Rome or Florence for example, and give English lessons and thus earn enough to keep themselves. And she would teach Ruth to be a Catholic, picturing to herself how eagerly her little sister would learn and assimilate the truths of Holy Church.

She wrote to her parents on receipt of their letters, enclosing such money as she could spare, and telling them of her good fortune in having found such a delightful post. She was well and happy and liked

the people she was with. She did not allude to the events that had taken place in Rome. They were buried and out of sight, and only dimly remembered like the episodes in some forgotten nightmare.

But she did think of those golden autumn days of Pentarn. She could see the woods with the bracken fading to delicious tints of yellow and copper, the beech trees lifting golden boughs against a pale blue sky; the long blue line of the Atlantic, the thought of which could always make her feel a little home-sick, as the islander must always feel when far from the sight and sound of the sea. Pentarn . . . yes, and the steep, winding, white road that led up to St. Faith's, with its little harbor pool where the sea-gulls roved about the fishing-boats in white blots, its huddled grey houses, its tiny crooked streets and alleys where the fishermen's children played. The lint-colored hair, the brown cheeks, the sea-blue eyes, the soft Cornish voices. The fishing-boats going out to find their treasure in the depths of the ocean. The days when the sea laughed and sparkled under a calm sky. The evenings at low tide when it lay like a gigantic silver mirror reflecting every detail of the brown and golden and white sails that stirred so languidly in the breeze. The nights of winter storm when the dull boom of the rockets would awaken every man, woman and child in St. Faith's, and every street would echo with the patter of hurrying feet rushing shoreward because there was a vessel in distress out there in the darkness.

She longed achingly at times to return to Pentarn. It hurt her to think she wouldn't be welcome there now. They didn't want her back any more. She had offended them past forgiveness. Would they always have these hard thoughts of her? Wasn't there anything that she had done for them in the past that would plead for her now?

Still there was very much to interest her in her new

life. The estate was a large one, consisting chiefly of immense stretches of olive-woods and vineyards. The Princess took a personal interest in it, and explained to Ursula the *mezzeria* system which prevailed there, as it still does on most Tuscan properties. By this ancient law, which savors somewhat of a modified feudal system, the peasants live on the estate rent free, and work it, receiving half the profits from all the sales of its produce. And as the estate itself is handed down from father to child, so the peasants continue to live upon it from generation to generation, sharing equally in its wealth but leaving all responsibility to the owner. It was a fair and just system, the Princess explained, because in case of necessity the landlord had to provide extra help during the harvest or vintage; he was also bound to see to the well-being of the peasants, and should the crops prove a failure to make up the deficit to them. In this way they were insured against bad seasons.

Every inch of the ground was cultivated. Wheat was sown beneath the olive trees. The vines were trailed between rows of maple trees and in spring their garlands of bright green leaves hung from stem to stem like gigantic emerald necklaces. Large crops of maize and potatoes were grown, and there were great tracts of chestnut woods which also provided a source of wealth and food.

There was no poverty on the estate, and the *contadini* seemed both happy and contented. They were pious and industrious, and Ursula soon made friends with some of the children who helped their parents in the work of the fields. In those days of late November the dark fruit of the olive was being gathered, and often a small figure could be seen scaling a ladder and dropping the ripe round balls into the shallow wicker-baskets which are used for the purpose. Even then the leaves still covered the

trees with a glory of color, and the chestnut woods showed a tinge of flame on the lower slopes of the hills. In the garden the roses were blossoming almost as freely as in summer. Clumps of salvias made blotted scarlet masses. There was an odor of violets mingling with the scent of roses and the queer acrid whiffs of olive smoke that blew in from the woods where the charcoal-burners were at work. The ripening persimmons hung decorative golden balls from bare branches stripped of all save their fruit.

In front of the villa there was a wide terrace facing south and very sunny on those days of late autumn. It had clipped box borders, and here and there were ancient statues much discolored by wind and weather, but lending an indefinable grace to the formal arrangement of the garden. On both sides of the terrace were deep groves of ilex trees that made a warm grey-green background. But in front of the house it was bordered only by a low stone balustrade that faced due south, and from which one looked over a wonderful stretch of country filled with the silver-grey foam of innumerable olive-trees beneath which showed a film of green. Belts of woods, with a wonderful purple and russet bloom upon them, lent warmth to the middle distance and far away in the plain one could on fine days catch a glimpse of Florence, with its Dome and many towers rising up delicately through a sea of mist. It was wonderfully beautiful with that touch of austerity that characterizes the Tuscan and Umbrian scenery, reminding one of the exquisite fragments of landscape that form the background for many an adoration of the Magi in the old pictures.

The villa itself was built on two stories, and was long and rambling with a tower at one end that marked the chapel. All the living rooms, which

were spacious and lofty, faced south, so that the sun poured in at the great windows nearly all day, whenever there was sun to shine. And that year the fine weather with its bright warmth lasted until Christmas.

One day the Princess said to Ursula:

"I have had a letter from Mr. Willmot, asking if he may come here. He is on his way home, as he intends to spend Christmas with his parents. It seems that his father is not very well."

She looked at Ursula as she spoke. The girl had improved very much in health and spirits since she had come to live with them. It was easy to see that she was both happy and contented.

"It seems," continued the Princess, "that there is a church in the neighborhood that he wishes to visit. There is a little-known Della Robbia in it, and perhaps you know how interested he is in Della Robbias!"

"Yes?" said Ursula. She was not listening very attentively to what the Princess was saying. The thought that Humphrey was coming to the old villa filled her with something like consternation and dismay. Useless all her efforts to forget him, never to think of him. It seemed as if he were always to cross her path, just as she believed that she had succeeded in learning the difficult lesson she had set herself.

Cruel that he should wish to come now. Her happiness would never seem quite such a vivid and radiant thing after he had come and gone. She would miss him, would know something of that old agony of longing to see his face and to hear his voice. He would vanish with that happy facility of his, and perhaps never think of her again, whereas she would always be thinking of him, longing for his return.

"I thought you would be pleased," said the Princess, in a disappointed tone; "you do not look at all pleased."

"Oh, you must not think that," said Ursula hastily. "I shall be glad to see him."

"I suppose it was really your sister who was their friend?" the Princess inquired.

"Yes. It was Daphne who stayed with them. Mrs. Willmot was very fond of her."

The Princess had been a little surprised to receive Humphrey's letter. She had never thought that he would follow up the careless invitation she had given him when they were in Rome. He wrote saying that he was going to leave Rome for Florence, and would like to spend a few days with her on his way to the latter city. Although she had asked him to do so, she had never thought he would propose himself in this way, first, because she believed she had alarmed him by alluding to his possible conversion, and, secondly, because she imagined that he would find it a little odd and awkward to stay in a house where Miss Finch, a girl whom he knew, occupied such a subordinate position. Once or twice while she was in Rome she had thought that Humphrey was certainly attracted by the beautiful Donna Ermelinda Caffari, who had accompanied them that night when he had met Ursula Finch in the lounge of the hotel. She had even thought that perhaps his desire to marry the only daughter of a noble "Black" family might have suggested to his mind the idea of becoming a Roman Catholic. And yet—had any thought of marrying her ever occurred to him? She had known Humphrey Willmot for the past eight years, and she had always found him a singularly agreeable companion, but she had never felt that she knew him any better than she had done at first.

During those eight years he had constantly visited Italy, had been first an ardent admirer of the art of the Quattro Cento and later on an enthusiast about the Baroque. He was one of those artistic young Englishmen, strongly imaginative and with literary

tastes, who seem to find themselves immediately at home in Italy. She and her husband had both liked him, and in Rome especially they had often joined forces and stayed at the same hotel. At first the Princess had regarded him as a man whose conversion would be achieved swiftly and perhaps very suddenly. The Established Church had lost its hold upon him, and when abroad he never pretended to attend its services. He went to Mass regularly on Sundays, and knew a great deal about the Roman churches and their ceremonies and saints and feasts. He was always to be seen at important functions in St. Peter's. But as the years went by and he still took no decided step the Princess lost hope, and wondered what was holding him back. Some secret pride, perhaps, some secret weakness, some obscure sense of unworthiness or fear of failure? In her own experience she had known that often very slight and insufficient obstacles can keep good people back for years. But the other night at the Grand Hotel he had once more awakened her old hopes concerning him. He had for the first time openly discussed the matter with her, and though he had laughingly entreated her not to display the net too openly, there had been something serious in his attitude, as of one who was deeply considering the step.

And he had said—rather to her surprise—that Ursula had had the courage to do the thing which he had never found courage to do. The knowledge of Ursula's conversion had obviously startled and impressed him.

He had seemed—for some reason or other—decidedly interested in the girl. But that he could ever have contemplated marrying her seemed to the Princess an absurdity. She was charming and pretty, she looked prettier than ever in her present, more reposeful life, and she was a lady and well-educated,

but she was distinctly not of Humphrey Willmot's world. With his wealth he could make a brilliant marriage, and it was hardly likely that even with the Cheam connection he would seriously think of Ursula Finch. Yet, at the end of his letter he had added a somewhat enigmatic postscript:

"Has Miss Finch proved the treasure you anticipated? Remember me to her if she is still there."

On the whole, she thought she would not answer the question. Let him come and find out all that there was to be found out about Ursula in her present surroundings. It was possible that if pity was the predominant ingredient of his feeling for her, he might find her less interesting now that she was no longer an object for compassion. She despatched her reply by telegram, asking him to let her know the day of his arrival and the time of his train. The thought of his coming visit perplexed her. Had he really settled to stay at Mintella chiefly on Ursula's account? It complicated things a little. Yet, the girl seemed quite unperturbed, as if her being there could have no possible connection with his visit.

A few days later the Princess motored to the nearest station, which was some miles away, to meet Humphrey Willmot. It was a brilliant golden autumn morning with a thick bank of mist lying in the valley below. Humphrey was coming from Arezzo, where he had spent last night. There was a church there which he wished to visit, and he had taken the opportunity of breaking his journey for this purpose.

There was a touch of frosty crispness in the air which had a wonderfully exhilarating quality. In the groves of olive trees the fruit was still being plucked, and the Princess greeted several of the workers by name, stopping to exchange a few words with them as to the quality and quantity of the crop. The vintage was long ago over, and the vines were stripped

and bare except for an occasional crimson leaf. Now the harvest of the olive was to be gathered in. She loved the place, with its rich sequence of crops, its tireless agriculture, its simple picturesque customs. Although she missed her husband very much, she still found plenty to interest her in life. There were the two children, little Maria fair as herself, and Gigi, who was so like her dead Francesco. And there was the land he had loved, where he had been born, and where he had died. His had not been a long life, but it had been a very happy, a very full one. She was thinking of him to-day as she drove to the station.

Humphrey alighted from the train, a slender well-groomed English figure. He always managed to look distinguished wherever he found himself. He took off his hat as he came up to her, uncovering his sleek, shining fair hair, which fell back from his forehead like a plume.

"So good of you to let me come. But don't, please, hand me over to your old chaplain just yet!"

So he was thinking of that evening when he had dined with her in Rome!

"I shall naturally wait until you give me permission." Her tone was as light as his.

His neat luggage was soon deposited in the car, which now resumed its journey. Humphrey sat with the Princess at the back. The motor was an open one; she had fancied that with his English love of fresh air he would prefer it so. And she herself was well wrapped up in a thick coat with an immense collar of black fur.

"What delicious air! It quite goes to my head!"

Glimpses of exquisite mountain scenery, of far-off snow-capped peaks gorgeously silver against a dark blue sky, flashed past them as they sped along

the steep, white, winding road. Near-by the chestnut woods made patches of sombre, fading flame.

"It's most awfully beautiful," he said. "I don't wonder you pine for your Tuscan fastness when you are in Rome."

"Oh, but it does one good to visit Rome. Here I live in a groove. It's a very nice groove, and I wouldn't change it, but I must think of the children."

"You will think me absurd," he said, "but I adore the odor of Tuscany. It's divine with that wild fragrance, and that hint of olive smoke lurking everywhere. I've tried sometimes to recapture it when I've been in England. That and the black lines of the cypress trees against the grey of the olives. By the way, how is little Miss Finch?"

"She is very well, and I think very happy. At least she tells me that she is happy. I'm afraid she's had a hard life—she is so unused to even the most common kindness!"

"Poor child," he murmured. "Still, I'm sure you are adorable to her. I believe in compensation, though for her it's been long in coming."

"I'm not sure about adorable," she answered, with a laugh, "but I hope you won't find that she's got too much to complain of." She paused a moment. "You won't turn her head, will you? Remember, that she's got Lady Cheam's example in front of her!" She was half in jest and half in real earnest.

"I shall make no promises at all," he said; "but you will let me talk to her sometimes, won't you? I used to enjoy talking to her at Pentarn."

"Did she enjoy talking to you?" inquired the Princess.

"I'm not sure, but I really believe she did."

"Did you see much of Donna Ermelinda after I left?"

"I saw her a few times. She's engaged, you know,

to somebody's only son. Very suitable, of course, and really quite a lot of money."

"I used to think sometimes that you would marry her."

He shook his head. "I admired her enormously, of course. But I always remember the sage's advice: Never marry a woman older than yourself, or taller than yourself, or from another country!"

"There is the villa," said the Princess suddenly, indicating a great creamy-grey building, irregularly shaped and planned, standing in a nest of warm, dark ilex-trees. The olives mounted from terrace to terrace, shivering in the wind, till they were almost on a level with the garden.

"It looks a charming retreat. I always want to possess a villa in Tuscany—it's the kind of thing you think about on a foggy day in London. But I expect I should want one nearer Florence than yours. I should want a club, a game of bridge in bad weather, an occasional round of golf. Banalities of that kind!"

"Not if you had a wife," she remarked.

"You are determinedly hymeneal in your conversation this afternoon," he said, in his leisurely satirical voice. "I am not so sure that if I had a villa I should want a wife to share it with me. I am quite glad you don't know my mother—you would aid and abet her in all her matrimonial projects on my behalf."

They were ascending the last hill to the villa now. The road was bordered on both sides by splendid cypress trees. Beyond were low stone walls that enclosed the *podere* of vines and olives. In a few minutes they had driven through the beautiful old stone gateway up to the house.

CHAPTER XXX

HUMPHREY WILLMOT followed the Princess into a large and lofty hall, carpeted in deep red. A huge wood fire burned at one end of it. Ancient pictures and portraits hung on the paneled walls, and figures in armor lurked in dark corners. They passed through several stiffly-furnished rooms, with tapestried or paneled walls, painted ceilings, and chilly marble floors, until they came to a set of smaller apartments looking out upon the terraced garden.

Here all was modern and simple and extremely comfortable. The salotto, where some refreshment had been placed in readiness for Humphrey, was furnished almost in an English style, with big armchairs and Chesterfields enveloped in loose chintz coverings. Quantities of flowers, both in vases and pots, decorated the room, and filled it with a delicious fragrance. A piano stood open, with music lying about. Maria was having her first lessons now, under the aegis of Ursula Finch.

"Do have some sandwiches," said the Princess, indicating a tray; "we don't have luncheon until half-past twelve. You must be hungry. Do try that liqueur, we make it here from walnuts."

Humphrey poured some of the dark brown liquid into a glass, and tasted it. "It is delicious," he told her. "But I have never apologized for descending upon you at such an unconscionably early hour. The other train, however, would have brought me here so late I should have felt I had missed a whole day."

Now that he was actually in the house he had quite an impatient longing to see Ursula again. To see her for once happy and untired. The Princess had,

as he knew, a naturally sweet disposition; she liked to feel that those about her were contented, and she was certain to have taken special pains to secure Ursula's happiness, because she knew so well all that the girl had suffered in Rome. And he wanted to see Miss Finch thus, under these new and favorable conditions. He had an idea that she might prove very attractive indeed, even dangerously attractive.

"Oh, you'd like to see the children, I know," she said, touching an electric bell. "I'll send a message to Miss Finch to bring them both down. I didn't intend her to have anything to do with Gigi, but he has taken an immense fancy to her."

He had an uncomfortable feeling that she could read his thoughts, and had discovered how deeply they were engrossed with Miss Finch.

And yet—would she ever seem again half so beautiful and brave to him as she had done at Pentarn, with the long green waves of the Atlantic curling and breaking into white foam at her feet? He could always visualize her in those surroundings, with the sea-gulls flying and crying above her head. A shabby small figure in her worn blue serge dress, yet with a face that had an odd power to haunt him.

There was a little stir outside the door which was pushed open to admit Maria, who came running eagerly in, followed more demurely by the stout Gigi and Ursula Finch.

She was so greatly changed that it gave Humphrey a little shock to see her under this new aspect. Never had he seen her look so well, so girlish, and so pretty. Youth had come back to her. There was a soft and pretty color in her face, and her grey eyes were shining like stars, like rare and brilliant grey jewels. Her black hair was simply but very carefully arranged. And she was no longer so heart-rendingly

shabby. The Princess had no doubt seen to that, and had replenished that scanty wardrobe.

"I'm glad to see you looking so much better for the change up here," was all he could find at first to say.

"Yes, I'm very well, thank you," she said.

"It's a beautiful place, and the air's delicious. Better even than Pentarn. But perhaps you miss the sea?"

"Not as much as I used to," she assured him.

"You must go to the top of the hill one day while you are here," said the Princess to Humphrey; "the view is wonderful on a clear day. You can see the Carrara mountains."

"Yes, I'd like to see everything," he said, a trifle absently.

"Miss Finch is indefatigable. You must help her to exercise Maria," said the Princess, with lazy good nature.

He began to talk about Pentarn. "My people are going back to the Abbey this winter. My father is thinking of buying it. He likes the Cornish climate.

"You're not staying in Italy this year?"

"No. My father isn't very fit, he's asked me to go back. I am going to Florence for a few days on Monday, and then I shall start for home."

Monday. Then his stay at the villa would only last four days. Ursula felt a sudden reasonless disappointment.

"You see, I've hardly been at home all the summer."

"No?" she said.

She was thinking: "So he's going back to Pentarn. He'll see the sea and the coast, and St. Faith's with the Island sheltering it from the Atlantic. He'll hear the gulls crying—." It caught at her heart with an ineradicable nostalgia.

The Princess seemed to read her thoughts. She said lightly:

"You mustn't make Miss Finch homesick by talking about Pentarn!"

"You won't soon be taking a run home yourself?" inquired Humphrey.

Why on earth didn't they send for her now that Daphne was so rich?

"But I couldn't possibly spare her!" The Princess spoke affectionately, and she stretched out a slim hand and touched Ursula's shoulder. "Maria is beginning to speak English quite well. And we never have any tears over our lessons now, do we? Miss Finch is my right hand."

She had a kind, instinctive wish to show Humphrey that she valued Ursula.

The girl said quietly: "I don't suppose I shall ever go back to Pentarn."

It hurt her to feel that she was almost forgotten there, and that if they thought of her at all now it was with anger. But they didn't really care, they were just indifferent. Daphne doubtless afforded them ample consolation for the shortcomings of herself and Nicholas. Poor Nicholas! Where was he now? What was he doing?

"Oh, but I venture to prophesy that you will!" Humphrey said.

Now it was time to take little Maria away until luncheon was ready. Humphrey was left alone again with his hostess.

His manner to Ursula had baffled her a little. She felt that he certainly took a very special interest in her, and she wondered if it would be quite wise to throw them much into each other's company while he was staying there. The position was extraordinary and somewhat unconventional, but then, after all, had not Ursula's own sister married Lord

Cheam? He was a far more important personage than Humphrey Willmot.

The Princess had not, however, to cope with a situation that promised to be difficult. That same day when they were all at luncheon a telegram for Ursula was brought into the room. She took it, astonished and a little frightened, for she had never received such a thing before in her life. Who could it be from? She looked toward the Princess, who said quietly, "Do open it, Miss Finch, and see if you wish to send an answer."

Ursula tore it open with fingers that trembled a little. She felt that Humphrey's eyes were upon her.

The message was brief and ran as follows:

"*Do come. Am bored and miserable. I hear you are near. Don't fail me. Daphne.*"

An address—that of an hotel in Florence—was given.

"No, there isn't any answer. I must think it over." Her face was perplexed. "It is from Daphne—from my sister. She is in Florence, and wants me to go to her."

"To go to her? But, my dear Miss Finch, I really can't spare you." There was dismay in the Princess' tone. What did Lady Cheam mean by telegraphing to Ursula in this way? She had always imagined that the two sisters could not be on the best of terms; they did not correspond, and she had come to the conclusion that Lady Cheam in her new life had no room for the little sister who had been sent to earn her own living in Italy.

She turned to Ursula:

"We must talk it over after luncheon, and see what you had better do. Of course, if your sister really wants you I mustn't, I suppose, keep you from going."

She had, however, a very strong private conviction

that Ursula had no wish to go to Florence. She felt annoyed that Lady Cheam should send for her in this peremptory manner.

When the meal was over they adjourned to the Princess' sitting-room and Humphrey went out into the loggia to smoke, thinking that they would probably wish to discuss the matter in private. Little Maria was fetched by the nurse. As Ursula passed out of the dining-room Humphrey, who was holding the door open, murmured in a low tone:

"But you mustn't really go away, Miss Finch. It would be too bad of you when I've only just come!"

Although he spoke in his light, disdainful way, as if nothing could really incommode him or had power to pierce his armor of slightly egoistic detachment, the words sent a little thrill through Ursula. They made her believe—as he had once before at Pentarn made her believe—that her comings and goings were of actual importance to him. Long ago she had conquered all her illusions on this point, and yet to-day there was something in his face and manner that stirred anew the ancient hope, and made her heart beat more quickly. He didn't want her to go away; perhaps he had even come hither feeling a certain pleasure that she was to be there and that he would see her. And now Daphne had sent for her, a short peremptory message that had called into life again all Ursula's old sense of immediate obedience. Humphrey's kindly meant words had made a lump rise in her throat, and she felt too that the tears were springing to her eyes. She did not want to go, just now, while he was here. She had believed that just for these few days she would see him every day, hear his voice, experience the old glamor that his very presence could produce.

She had been for too many years immolated upon the shrine of Daphne's comfort, Daphne's well-be-

ing. Their paths were far apart. What had she, an obscure nursery-governess, to do with Lady Cheam?

She became aware that the Princess was speaking to her.

"Now tell me," she said kindly, "do you really want to go to Florence to see your sister? I can spare you perfectly well for a few days if you wish to go. The nurse can look after Maria."

This might, indeed, prove to be the beginning of a *rapprochement* between Ursula and her family. It might mean that Lady Cheam intended to release her from the obligation of earning her own living. If so, she felt that she could not possibly stand in her way. It would be selfish and inconsiderate to do so.

"I don't want to go at all," said Ursula, speaking with difficulty. In spite of all her efforts the tears rushed to her eyes. "But you know that I've always —all my life—had to do what Daphne wanted."

"Wouldn't it do perhaps if I invited her to come here for a few days? You know we've quantities of spare room here."

"Oh, no—please not! I'd rather go to her than that!"

"I dare say you are right. The question is whether you'd really better see her at all."

Ursula read the telegram over again. The typed words stood out with a Daphne-like emphasis. *"Do come. Am bored and miserable. I hear you are near. Don't fail me. Daphne."*

"If you only knew how difficult it is for me to go against her," said Ursula. She felt the chains of her old servitude. She was sewing for Daphne, cooking for Daphne, mending for Daphne. She was sitting up till two o'clock in the morning to finish some work for Daphne. It was not easy to break chains that had been forged through so many years of patient, assiduous toil. And Daphne wanted her now.

"Suppose you went for a week?" suggested the Princess. "I am sure I can spare you for a week."

"A week," repeated poor Ursula.

Humphrey Willmot would have gone to England before her return. Could she—could she make the sacrifice? It was a small but heavy one. But perhaps it was required of her.

"I don't want to go at all. I'd far, *far* rather stay here. I'm only afraid of seeming selfish, uncaring."

The Princess could have stamped with impatience.

"When you've been a slave to her all your life!" she said, indignantly.

Ursula was astonished into saying: "Why, how did you know?"

"Mr. Willmot said something about it to me once. He said she was the one completely selfish woman he had ever known. That is no doubt the reason why she has sent for you now. If she really wanted you, if it were a case of sorrow or illness, it would be different. This is a whim, a caprice. You can do just as you choose, but I am not going to let you be sacrificed for more than one week." The Princess spoke with determination. She liked Ursula and she had a strong wish to befriend her. She thought, too, it would be good for Daphne to know that her sister had a powerful friend.

"Then perhaps I had better go to-morrow morning. It's too late to go to-day, isn't it?"

"It certainly is," said the Princess; "but you can go to-morrow if you like. I will send a telegram this afternoon, and you must leave here at nine to-morrow morning."

"Thank you," said Ursula. She moved toward the door. "It's very kind of you to let me go," she said hesitatingly. She felt that she ought to thank her, and yet she wished with all her heart that she had put an uncompromising veto upon the scheme.

"I feel I oughtn't to stand in your way if your sister really wants you. She may wish to keep you permanently with her, now her own circumstances are so altered."

Ursula nearly said: "You don't know Daphne." But she refrained. She went out of the room, and betook herself upstairs to pack.

What would Daphne think of her now? Of course, she was better dressed than in the old days, thanks to the Princess. She did her hair differently and with more care. Since coming to Tuscany she was no longer so thin, thanks to the better food, the hours of leisure and rest, that had refreshed both body and mind. Her face was plumper and she had more color. But the great change, as she knew, was an interior one. She was a Catholic, and her religion had given her courage. She wasn't afraid of people, of what they might say, of what they might think and do. But if she had not been a Catholic she would not have gone to Daphne now. She would have refused quite simply because she did not wish to go. Now she was going just because it did cost her so much, because she did not dare reject this opportunity of self-sacrifice. It meant that she must leave Mintella while Humphrey was staying in the house, although he had asked her to remain. She slipped down upon her knees, crossed herself, and said a brief prayer. God so seldom asked or accepted a real sacrifice. It was a test of the soul's strength. And this was one that had power to hurt her. She had the strong feeling that her life was being shaped by other Hands, and that her part was to obey, to conform. It wasn't only for Daphne's sake that she was going away; she was not even quite sure that it was on Daphne's account at all.

She began to pack the few things she would require. When she came back to the villa next week

Humphrey would have gone. She *must* give up thinking of him, dreaming of him. Always when he came he had this terrible power to fill all her thoughts, as if he had taken possession of her very life. And she loved him. To-day she had been afraid to meet his eyes lest he should read her secret.

When she came back Humphrey would have gone. It was quite possible that she might never see him again.

CHAPTER XXXI

In the morning it was barely light when Ursula, having finished her dressing and packing, went to fetch little Maria to go down to the chapel. The child was not quite ready and Ursula had to wait a few minutes for her. They entered the chapel together, and sat in their usual seats. The priest came in and began to say Mass. When Ursula raised her head she saw that Humphrey Willmot was kneeling not far from her.

It gave her a sudden sensation of joy to see him. Although she remembered that he had once told her he had never become a Catholic because it would meet with so much opposition if he were to do so, she knew that he was not indifferent, that he understood and appreciated the Catholic religion. She offered a little prayer now for his conversion. It was the one thing he needed to make him quite perfect.

To-day Ursula felt strong and full of courage and confidence. She meant to be, all through her life, a cheerful giver. She would make such sacrifices as were demanded of her, eagerly, and not grudgingly or of necessity. She would not measure their price of pain too closely.

All through Mass she knelt down, a devout and recollected figure. When it was over she rose to leave the chapel. She had not much time to spare, and she must have some breakfast before she left. As she went out of the door she saw that Humphrey was holding it open for her.

He followed her down the long passage that led back into the house.

"Will you allow me to say I am so glad that you have become a Catholic, Miss Finch?" he said, in rather a softer tone than usual.

"Thank you," said Ursula. "It has made me very happy," she added, looking up at him.

"I can see that," he said. "You've changed very much, you know, since you left Pentarn."

"Have I?"

"I dare say you have forgotten that once when we were there we discussed the question of religion."

"Oh, no—indeed, I remember it perfectly."

"Then perhaps you have not forgotten a remark you made? It pleased me very much. I think that is why I remember it so well."

"What was it?" she asked.

"You said I was the first person who had ever said anything to you in praise of the Catholic Church. I hope that I sowed the very first little seed of your conversion." His eyes were bright and searching as they rested upon her now. They seemed to expect, to demand, an answer.

Ursula was too honest and truthful to deny the accuracy of his conclusion. She said quietly: "I think you did, you destroyed some of my intolerance. You gave me Crashaw and Mrs. Meynell to read. They helped me, too. And when I went to Rome I remembered what you had said about St. Peter's."

He was silent for a moment.

"I envy you, Miss Finch," he said at last, in a quiet, thoughtful tone. "You have had the courage —the very great courage—to do what I've often wanted and never dared to do myself. And yet, I suppose you really stand to lose much more than I should by the step."

"I have lost my home," said Ursula; "they have told me I am not to go back. It would be too much of a scandal for the rector's daughter to return home as a Catholic. I quite see that they can't receive me." Her voice was steady.

"I am sorry you are going away. I should like

to have heard much more about it. Just how you came, and when and where. The little things that make a conversion are psychologically so interesting. Only there is one thing no one can ever tell you, and that is just how they received the faith. We can only fall back upon the supernatural explanation that it was the infusion of grace that did it, the workings of the Holy Spirit in the soul that had uttered its humble petition to receive that faith. There have been cases too when it came unsought, as it did to St. Paul. People often say when they hear that a man's become a Catholic: 'What made him do it? Who has got hold of him?' And the convert can give no logical explanation, in nine cases out of ten, for his action. He sometimes scarcely knows himself how and when he crossed the boundary line between faith and unfaith."

Ursula listened to this long speech with varying emotions. She felt that Humphrey must be very close to that boundary of which he spoke.

"Sometimes I know we owe it to the prayers of others," he continued, "and so I am going to ask you to pray for me, Miss Finch."

Her face wore a strangely-controlled expression. Then she said gravely: "But I always pray for you."

She moved toward the stairs. It was time for her to eat her breakfast or she would not be ready when the motor came for her. It cost her a little effort to leave him now. He seemed to need her help in some obscure way that she did not understand. His words, uttered with a kind of passionate eloquence, had moved her profoundly.

Humphrey watched her as she went. Her little frank confession had at once startled and flattered him. He wanted to know much more, and at that moment he felt that he could not possibly let her go. What did Lady Cheam want with her now? It was

all part of her monumental selfishness that she should have sent for her sister just at this critical juncture.

He felt furious with Daphne.

The journey to Florence occupied less than two hours. As the train steamed into the station Ursula looked out of the window to see if she could discern Daphne waiting for her upon the platform. In her telegram she had told her what time her train would arrive. But there was no sign of Lady Cheam anywhere, and Ursula, feeling slightly disappointed, took a cab and drove to the hotel on the Lung'Arno where her sister was staying.

Various servants emerged, as the cab stopped, and possessed themselves of her very modest luggage. She went at once to the bureau to ask for Lady Cheam. For, of course, Daphne would be in and waiting for her.

"The lady is out—gone out for the day," said the manager; "she will not be back till this evening—in time for dinner. And Milford has gone to Venice for a few days." He made a regretful gesture.

Ursula's heart sank. Had she foreseen this she could have remained one day longer at the villa.

"I am Lady Cheam's sister," she said. "I telegraphed to say that I was coming. Did she leave any message for me?"

He took a handful of letters from a pigeon-hole.

"There is a telegram here for her, but it arrived after she had left."

"Perhaps you will kindly show me to a room? I am going to stay a few days with her."

Ursula felt suddenly hopeless. She blinked her eyelids to keep back the tears. All her high courage of the morning seemed suddenly to have deserted her. Daphne had not even troubled to wait for her answer. Her brief mood of boredom and misery

must have vanished. Perhaps she had met some friends, had joined them in some expedition. Ursula began to wish now that she had remained at the villa. The sacrifice had been quite useless.

When she found herself alone in her room overlooking the river and close, as the manager informed her, to her sister's sitting-room, she sat down and began to consider the matter. Why had Daphne sent for her? Why had Lord Cheam gone to Venice without his wife? They had been married scarcely two months. Was the marriage already a failure? There had been a quarrel perhaps, and then Daphne, in disgust and weariness had telegraphed for her. There could be no other possible reason. Daphne could never surely have learned of Humphrey's temporary presence at the villa. She put that thought from her as an unworthy one. Daphne had simply sent for her because she had probably heard of her whereabouts from Pentarn, and was bored at the moment when she had written the telegram. But her ill-humor rarely lasted long. She was like a child who only needs to be shown a pretty toy to have its attention diverted from the cause of its transient woe. Someone had no doubt come to the rescue, proposed an expedition, and Daphne had gone off, forgetting her husband and Ursula, extracting all the enjoyment she could from the present hour. She was always like that.

Ursula looked round her room. It was pretty and daintily furnished, and had a good view over the Arno. The green hills that stretched westward were very softly outlined against the pale blue of the December sky. The sun shone on the picturesque houses and church-towers of Oltr' Arno. The manager had given her this charming south room because he knew that Lady Cheam could perfectly well pay for it. Ursula's appearance had puzzled him a

little, she was so different from the exquisitely dressed and obviously wealthy and extravagant Lady Cheam. Still she was English; he believed what she said.

She hated the thought of going down-stairs to lunch alone. The manager had informed her that luncheon was served at half-past twelve. Perhaps there would be a great many people, all strangers to her. Why had Daphne deserted her in this way? She had come, as quickly as she could, to be with her, and Daphne had coolly gone out and forgotten her. It was so like Daphne; she ought to have expected it. She ought to have been able to laugh instead of sitting there, vainly trying to repress her tears. Perhaps, she would have laughed at her present predicament if it hadn't been for Humphrey. It had been like the sharp severing of something with a knife to leave the villa just after his arrival, to detach herself from the strange joy of being for the second time in her life under the same roof with him. And every word he had spoken to her had seemed to assure her that he was at least not indifferent to her presence there. It had even seemed sometimes to her that he had been endeavoring to recapture something of the intimacy of those old talks they had had together on the cliffs at Pentarn. But even now she would not let herself dwell upon the possibility, the hope, that he could ever cherish any deeper feeling for her. When that thought came she drove it resolutely away, because she knew of old its inherent power to diminish her courage. Yet he had seemed almost eager to learn that his own chance word had really played some little part in her subsequent conversion.

"I must pray for him a great deal, and then he will become a Catholic," she thought. She had longed to tell him, when he spoke of those early be-

ginnings of faith, how it came, like a sudden inexplicable outpouring of burning consuming light, that tore the scales from one's eyes by a fiery action that brooked no hindrance. That infusion of grace was almost like a fierce physical process that caused the blind to see. One understood then the mighty rushing wind, the tongues of fire, at Pentecost. She had wanted to urge him to pray that he might receive that faith. She longed ardently for his conversion. She had felt such joy at the knowledge that he had been in the chapel that morning. And there had been something wistful, almost envious, in his look as he spoke to her of her own conversion. Yes, he had envied her—her, Ursula Finch. Realizing, perhaps, that she possessed the one thing needful, the most abiding and precious riches of all.

She unpacked her few things, arranging them with meticulous care in the great wardrobe and spacious chest of drawers. Her personal possessions were so few that they seemed almost lost in those immense receptacles. She wondered what Daphne would say when she came back and found her already installed. It was quite likely that she would not be in the least pleased to see her. She would be perhaps no longer in that bored and miserable mood which had inspired her to send for her sister. She might even show her that she was in the way.

After luncheon Ursula went out for a walk. She visited some of the nearer churches, and walked as far as the Cascine, marveling at the exquisite glimpse of the snow-crowned Carrara mountains that was visible in the distance. Then back to the Ponte Vecchio and into the queer ancient tortuous streets of Oltr' Arno. The afternoon was perfect, and the sun shone royally. There was a bright blue sky overhead with a few clouds traveling leisurely across its surface; the river was jade-colored with spaces of turquoise. In the mellow sunlight of late

autumn the honey-colored houses and rosy roofs and grey towers of Florence were warmed to a delicious glow that made them seem like jeweled things, wrought of topazes and rubies. Very fair were the low green hills, and as she climbed to higher ground and saw the wonderful city lying at her feet, stretching away to Fiesole and Careggi and Settignano and the hundred beautiful hill-towns and villages that encircle Florence like a gleaming girdle of ivory and pearl, its loveliness became to her almost overpowering. It was exquisitely drawn, delicately painted. And in the midst of it stood the great Dome in tones of ruby and purple with the pale ivory shaft of Giotto's tower standing beside it. Less splendid and dominating than St. Peter's, perhaps, but possessing an individual and intimate beauty of its own.

When it grew dusk she turned back into the hotel almost reluctantly. In reply to her inquiries she found that Lady Cheam had not yet returned. Ursula went up into her bedroom and sat down by the open window. The light had faded in the sky, and twilight had drawn her delicate violet veils over the city and the river. Lights showed from the town on the opposite bank, pricking the streets with a glow of soft illumination.

At last she grew tired of sitting there alone, for she had brought no work and had nothing to read. She went down-stairs and sat in the lounge which was formed by a kind of inner hall, filled with chairs, large and small, and a number of little wicker-tables on which stood matches and ash-trays. Men and women were sitting about in groups, some smoking, some having tea. People passed continually through the lounge on their way to the elevator, and Ursula watched them with some interest. She noticed especially an English family consisting of a father and mother and two young daughters, all

very prosperous and well-dressed, and arrogant-looking as if they cherished a secret disdain of their surroundings. It was a characteristic that reminded her of Daphne. One of the girls stared at Ursula with a slow critical gaze that made her feel suddenly rather poor and dowdy. Then two young Italian officers passed through, wearing their handsome blue cloaks. They were talking and laughing in an animated, excited way, and they too glanced at Ursula with a kind of bold admiration. Then more English people. . . . A tall, elderly, obviously ex-army man, and his beautiful wife wrapped in costly furs.

"I don't suppose it'll last six months, do you?" she said, as she walked on. "I heard he'd gone off in a tremendous, towering rage." She spoke in a high sweet voice, and Ursula could not help hearing what she said.

It gave her a pang of anxiety. Was she speaking of Daphne? For the second time she began to wonder about her sister's marriage. Had it already proved an unhappy one? Wasn't it a success after all? Had a two-months' trial sufficed to proclaim it a failure to all the world?

And then Daphne herself, more lovely and more beautifully dressed than any of the preceding figures, came into the lounge, followed by a young man with very bright dark eyes whom Ursula recognized at once as Mr. Carter, the impecunious young artist who lived at St. Faith's and who had been so desperately in love with her before her marriage. His face fell a little as he saw and recognized Ursula.

"Daphne—I got your telegram—I came." She had stumbled to her feet, had come toward Daphne with something of her old deprecating half-apologetic attitude.

She paused miserably. She had the feeling that Daphne was looking down upon her from an immeasurable height.

"Ah, I never thought you'd be able to get away," she said, in a light tone. "I hope you haven't been waiting too long. You remember Mr. Carter, don't you? Let's come up to my room."

She nodded to the young man who still seemed discomfited at the presence of Ursula. *"A bientôt!"* she said to him, nodding carelessly. "Don't forget you're dining with me."

The two sisters disappeared together into the elevator, and Ursula could not help noticing that Mr. Carter stood there gazing up at it, as it vanished into the dark spaces above, with a foolish rather angry expression in his eyes.

"It really gave me quite a shock to see you so suddenly," said Daphne. "Why didn't you let me know you were coming? Didn't Princess What's-her-name mind your racing off like this?"

"No, not very much. And I did send you a telegram," said Ursula, miserably.

She wished with all her heart that she had not come. *Ogni muta una caduta* say the wise Tuscan peasants. Every change is a disaster—there was truth in the words.

CHAPTER XXXII

In those first few minutes Ursula became aware, beyond all manner of doubt, that, however much Daphne had wished for her company yesterday when she had despatched the telegram, she had no need of it now, and even regarded her as very much in the way. She had discovered the presence of her ancient admirer in Florence, and she had now no further use for her sister. When Ursula realized this she felt a renewed sense of bitterness because her sacrifice had been made in vain. She had come away against the wishes of all the kind and good people at the villa, and her only reward had been to find herself *de trop*. She might have known it! Daphne would never change. The eldest Miss Finch, the spoiled beauty of Pentarn and St. Faith's, and Lady Cheam were one and the same person, demanding of life only that they should be smartly-dressed, adequately amused, and daintily fed.

They walked in silence down the long heated passage until they reached the suite of rooms that Daphne and her husband occupied. Daphne threw open the door, and flung herself into an armchair, yawning.

"So you jumped at my invitation, Ursula," she said. "I imagined somehow that you would be far too busy to come, as well as far too conscientious to ask for leave. I am glad they were not too tiresome about it."

"The Princess did not wish me to come. But she was very kind."

"You speak as if you were sorry to come away," said Lady Cheam. "Is it such a delectable situation? I should have thought it must be tremendously boring

out there in the country. Nothing to do all day and no one to talk to!"

"I have a little girl to look after and teach. That keeps me fairly busy. And in my spare time I read a great deal."

"You would!" said Daphne, with a touch of satire. "Is it still Crashaw and Francis Thompson, or have you found other gods since Humphrey Willmot ceased to be your guide, philosopher, and friend?"

Ursula was silent. At the mention of Humphrey's name a faint flush stained her face.

"Have you seen anything of him, by the way?" inquired Daphne. "He's somewhere in Italy now, I believe. At least Mrs. Willmot said so in her last letter."

Ah, then she knew! She had always known. Perhaps that was why she had sent the telegram.

"I have seen him," said Ursula, guardedly; "we met in Rome."

Daphne seemed to betray a slight increase of interest.

"In Rome? Really? When you were with those dreadful Garroni people?" she asked.

"No, it was just after I had left them."

"But he is not still there?" said Daphne. "I am sure his mother said he was coming to Florence on his way home. But she writes so illegibly, poor dear, that I never have time to make it all out!"

There was a little note of disdain in her voice as she spoke of Mrs. Willmot.

"He is not in Rome now," said Ursula.

"You are very mysterious! Why don't you tell me where he is, if you really know?"

"He is staying with Princess Cantarelli. I left him at the villa." Ursula's voice was strained.

"At the villa?" repeated Daphne, with well-simulated surprise. "What on earth is he doing there?"

Ursula longed to say: "But you knew—surely you knew; that was why you sent for me!" She was silent, afraid perhaps that she might be tempted to utter the words.

"I heard rumors that he was going to marry an Italian," said Daphne, "but surely the Princess must be years older."

"She is thirty-four," said Ursula, "but I am sure he isn't going to marry her. She was devoted to her husband, and he has not been dead very long."

"Besides people spoke of a young girl—about eighteen, I think. Not a widow at all. Well, I wish you had persuaded him to come with you, Ursula. He is always a delightful companion, and he knows Italy by heart."

"He knew I was coming to see you," said Ursula.

Daphne lit a cigarette and began to smoke. "You are a strange girl, Ursula," she said presently; "you have never once asked me if I am happy. Do you realize that I am a very important person indeed now?"

"Yes," said Ursula. She looked at her sister. Yes, Daphne was more beautiful now than she had ever been. She was dressed as never before, in clothes at once costly and simple. Those Russian furs she had been wearing when she came into the lounge had set off her fairness to perfection. Her hair was exquisitely dressed as if by very skilful and practised fingers. She wore a row of large fine pearls round her throat. Diamonds sparkled on her slim hands. She was further removed from Pentarn now than Ursula herself.

"I hope you are happy, Daphne," she said, after a few seconds' quiet reflection.

"Well, if you must know, I am not particularly happy just now. Cheam has a most vile temper, and he went off to Venice the day before yesterday

in a huff. I suppose I shall have to sit here till he comes back." Her voice was cold and disdainful. "He has the most wonderful ways of making himself disagreeable. I really think sometimes he has reduced it to a fine art!"

"I am very sorry you are not happy," said Ursula simply.

"Oh, you really need not pity me," said Daphne, with a laugh that did not ring quite true. "I have everything now that I ever wanted, and how few women can say that! Quantities of money—I can spend and spend and never come to an end of it. Before I used to feel just like those miserable little ragged children you see staring into sweet-shops. Cheam is never stingy, I will say that for him, it is fortunately not one of his faults. But he is jealous, and though that is amusing at first it becomes very wearing. He is years and years older than I am, and he gets so cross when he is taken for my father." She laughed now quite merrily. "He might be my grandfather by a little stretch of the imagination, so he ought not to feel so hurt about it!"

"I was afraid when mamma first wrote and told me of your engagement that you were making a mistake," said Ursula quietly.

Daphne opened her large blue eyes very wide indeed.

"But I have not made a mistake, you dear old goose," she said, in a tone of surprise. "I am quite as happy as most women and probably, if the truth were known, a great deal happier. You see, I always know exactly what I want, and if it comes to me mixed up with a great many things I don't care about, I am not going to ruin my complexion by crying and thinking I have been deluded. I was considered extraordinarily lucky to get Cheam, I, a girl without a penny and no connections! You know that

mamma and I had quite made up our minds that I was to marry Humphrey Willmot. I won't deny that I should have liked that. He attracted me very much, he is so good-looking and clever. Besides he was rich and was in a very good set. But I soon saw it would be foolish to think about him, for he hardly ever came near the house all the time I was there. I was hurt and angry at the time, but I met Cheam almost at once, and he proposed to me the following week. He isn't much to look at, and of course he's getting old, but then there is the title, and he is enormously rich. I am often astonished at my own luck. He has made a most generous provision for me; you will hardly believe it but papa saw to that!"

Daphne had finished her cigarette, and now she rose, went into the bedroom and rang for her maid. She seemed to place herself in the hands of this functionary with the docility of a little child. Ursula watched, half-fascinated, the way in which her hair was dressed. Presently Daphne stood before her in a black charmeuse dress, simply, almost severely, made, which set off her slender figure, her wonderful fairness. Ursula thought she looked almost regal.

"By the way, Mr. Carter will dine with us. Have you got anything to wear? I'm afraid nothing of mine would be of any use." She looked down at Ursula's slight, small form with a kind of good-natured contempt.

"Yes, I have a black dress the Princess gave me. It looks all right," said Ursula. She knew of old that it didn't matter in the least what she wore nor how she looked when she was with Daphne. No one had ever noticed her when her sister was present, except one man.

"You remember Aubrey Carter, of course," said Daphne, "he is just the same old dear he always was!

It was really providential my coming across him yesterday evening when I was feeling very nearly bored to death."

"Won't Lord Cheam mind?" said Ursula, hesitatingly.

"Mind? Mind what?" said Daphne, with a frown.

"His going out with you—dining with you."

"Of course he will mind, as you call it, if he finds out. He is fiendishly jealous as I told you just now." Daphne, having dismissed her maid directly she was dressed, now sat in front of the long mirror regarding her own image with an attentive complacent scrutiny.

"Then ought you?"

"My dear child, we are not in Pentarn. And really now that I come to compare them Cheam's rages are not half so bad as papa's!" She laughed.

There was a little pause during which Daphne dabbed some powder on her nose and gave a touch of scarlet to her lips. She was wonderfully lovely, Ursula thought. But there was something careless and reckless about her now that made her sister feel afraid.

"Is there any news of Nicky?" she asked at last.

"Oh, no. He's gone to the bow-bows, naughty boy!"

"Oh, Daphne!"

"Oh, Ursula! What's the matter now?"

"I mean, he may be starving!"

"Trust Nicky not to starve! I'm glad they had the sense to send him out of the country. Fancy a disreputable brother descending upon one in Grosvenor Square."

"I wish I knew where he was. I should like to write to him."

"I dare say they have his address at Pentarn," remarked Daphne.

"Doesn't anyone care what becomes of him?" said Ursula, indignantly.

"I suppose mamma does, but she never mentions him, she isn't allowed to. Fancy being obedient like that! Now if Cheam ever forbade me to mention a particular subject or person he would never hear the last of them. Someone asked papa the other day how his son was, and he replied, 'I have no son.' "

Ursula's heart ached for her brother. Some day she would find out where he was; she would write to him and send him money. If she had been in Daphne's place, with so much at her disposal, she would long ago have paid his debts and entreated him to return.

Daphne changed the subject of conversation. She had not cared for Nicholas because he had never been under the slightest illusion with regard to her. And he had not omitted to show her that this was the case. He had always preferred Ursula.

"So you really like being a nursery-governess, Ursula? And did Humphrey know that he was going to meet you in that capacity?"

"I suppose so. He knew that I was there."

"Did you see much of him?"

"How could I? He only came yesterday. But we met at meals and I saw him in the chapel." She said this expressly in order to prepare the way for the disclosure of her conversion.

"In the chapel? I suppose they are Roman Catholics? Do they really insist upon your attending their services?"

"They don't insist. But I like to go, Daphne."

"You *like* to go?" She gazed at her sister with a long and curious scrutiny.

"I am a Catholic myself. I was received while I was in Rome."

Ursula spoke in a steady voice and her eyes met Daphne's squarely.

"A Catholic? *You?*" said Daphne, astonished.

"Yes. It has made me very much happier, but that is only a small part of it. I feel that it's the only thing that matters now in the world—to be a Catholic and a good one."

"Have you told them at home?" inquired Daphne, lifting her eyebrows. She had never regarded her sister as exceptionally pious. Of course, she had regularly done all that was required of her at Pentarn in the matter of attending services. It had formed part of her implicit obedience to the Powers that Be. But she had never thought of it as a voluntary action on Ursula's part.

"Have you told them at home?"

"Yes. They don't like it. They don't want me to go back to Pentarn. And, of course, I see that in any case it would put them in an awkward position," said Ursula.

"Of course they wouldn't be likely to have you back after that. You have burned your boats with a vengeance, my dear!"

Ursula was silent.

"Fancy your doing anything so rebellious as that! You are coming on, my dear Ursula. But what on earth made you?"

"I can't explain. But I had to do it, Daphne."

"I'm really sorry," said Lady Cheam; "it always strikes me as such a foolish thing to do. And Cheam's nearly as bad as papa about it—he hates it so. He'll never let you come to stay with us much."

"I don't suppose I should have come in any case. I'm a very unimportant person, Daphne."

"Still you might have come to keep him amused. I've always had an idea you'd get on together, you're both so very old-fashioned. But now he'll never give you credit for having any sense." She spoke almost regretfully.

"I expect I shall stay in my present situation for some time, probably till the children get beyond my teaching."

"I am not snobbish," said Daphne, "but I do dislike to feel that my own sister is a nursery-governess. It makes my own beginnings seem so forlorn! However, I am glad you had the sense to live abroad, I can speak of my sister who lives in Italy without saying what you are doing there. So do not say anything about it in front of young Carter, please; do leave the poor child one or two illusions."

"Why should you care what he thinks?" said Ursula, with a touch of anger.

Daphne looked surprised at the vehemence in her sister's tone.

"I happen to feel like it, that's all," she said coldly.

If Ursula annoyed her too much she would send her back to-morrow. But no, she shouldn't go to Mintella while Humphrey was there. She suspected Ursula of at least a warm interest in Humphrey, and the knowledge that he was staying in the same house had aroused her old jealousy. It was this knowledge indeed that had prompted her to telegraph for her sister. She had suffered a little through Humphrey; he had administered certain delicate blows to her pride. He had been aware of Ursula even when she herself was present. Of course, it was by a mere coincidence that he should have been staying in the same house as Ursula now. He could never have gone there on purpose to see her, the idea was too ridiculous. A little, plain, shabby, stupid girl like Ursula! Yet she had said that he had been in the chapel that morning. Did he approve of the step she had taken? Or, perhaps, he had been instrumental in bringing it about? Once his mother had told her that Humphrey had been at one time very greatly attracted by the Roman Catholic religion, and she had felt thankful when the phase had passed

off. Daphne remembered this now. She thought to herself: "How could Ursula have had the courage? It's the first time she's ever gone against them at Pentarn. Yet she must have known they would never have her back again." That was so like Ursula, she was unworldly to a degree that became mere folly. She, without a penny, could cut herself off in this way from the only home she had. Hadn't she counted the cost at all?

However, Daphne was never sufficiently interested in anyone to permit them to occupy her thoughts for long. She said, with a half-bitter little smile: "Would you think to look at me now that I had the sword of Damocles waving above my fair hair at this moment? Cheam may return at any moment, and in his present mood he is a terrible kill-joy!"

She had hardly completed her sentence when the door opened abruptly, and a short, rather spare, elderly man with a bald head and wearing pince-nez came into the room. His face was thin and yellowish and he had a long sharp nose.

"Am I to understand you are referring to myself, Daphne?" he inquired, in a bland sub-acid tone.

Daphne shrugged her shoulders. She did not seem in the least startled.

"Just as you please," she said indifferently; "though it is hardly worth while discussing it now. We mustn't quarrel in front of Ursula, it would shock her dreadfully. Cheam, this is my sister, Ursula. She is a nursery-governess at present to Princess Cantarelli's children."

Ursula rose and shook hands with her brother-in-law. He looked older even than she had expected. It was small wonder that he was often taken for Daphne's father.

"When did you come?" he said to Ursula.

"To-day."

"It's the first time you've seen your sister since her marriage, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"You weren't at the wedding. There was a little girl—Ruth. Short frocks, rather delicate-looking."

"Yes. Ruth is the youngest."

"He would like to know if you think I have improved." Daphne's voice was mocking. "But you need not answer all his questions, Ursula."

"I am ready for dinner if you are," said Lord Cheam. "Miss Finch will dine with us, of course."

"Yes, and I have asked an old friend of ours to meet her. A young artist from Pentarn called Carter," said Daphne.

"I will go and get ready," said Ursula, thankful to escape.

She went out, leaving them alone together. "How strange they are," she thought to herself. "Papa and mamma were never like that. Even when they had rows they always seemed to like each other."

Lord Cheam had given her the impression of almost hating Daphne. Of course she cared nothing for him, but she loved the material ease and comfort that he was able to give her. Their marriage already was a tragic failure, and yet Daphne seemed perfectly contented. She had known, as she said, exactly what she wanted, and she had received it.

CHAPTER XXXIII

LORD CHEAM walked restlessly up and down the hotel sitting-room. He had been rather relieved than otherwise to find his wife ensconced there with her own sister; it was hardly what he had expected. But it was the first time that he had heard of the position that Ursula occupied in Italy, and the fact that she was in such a dependent situation annoyed him. But then Daphne had never been frank with him about her own family. She had never even told him about Nicholas, and he had heard the story from a third person. Her want of frankness, her persistent endeavor to keep him in the dark about many little things that concerned her, were a perpetual source of irritation to him.

"I wish you would not walk up and down the room like that," said Daphne, breaking the silence; "you remind me of something in its cage."

He paid no attention to her remark, and continued to pace up and down the room. At last he said:

"Your sister is very pretty, Daphne, and she is charming-looking too."

"Oh, we are all of us all right to look at, if it comes to that," responded Daphne, cheerfully.

She glanced at herself in the mirror, and knew that to the most angry and affronted husband she must appear beautiful.

"I do not care to have my sister-in-law earning her bread in such a subordinate position," he continued; "we must put an end to it. Now that you are married she ought to go home."

"Oh, it's no good your thinking of that. They wouldn't have her!"

She could see by his slightly alarmed expression that he believed he had chanced upon another family-

skeleton. The thought delighted her. She took a special pleasure in provoking him.

"Why won't they have her?" he asked. "Has she had to leave the country, too?"

"Oh, no, Ursula has done nothing disgraceful," said Daphne, "but since she has been abroad she has very foolishly become a Roman Catholic. That is one of the seven deadly sins at Pentarn, you know. Its punishment is always social ostracism."

"A Catholic? You never told me your sister was a Catholic!"

"I happened not to know it myself, until this evening," said Daphne, coolly. "Ursula and I don't correspond. Still, it was a fool thing to do, for it has shut the door of the only home she's got in the world against her."

Lord Cheam felt aggrieved. He had liked the look of Ursula, discerning in her the presence of those sterling qualities which his wife so sadly lacked, and he had hoped that she might have a good influence over Daphne. But he was bitterly prejudiced against the Church.

"Catholic or not I don't choose to have your sister earning her living as a nursery-governess," he said at last.

"Do not let it disturb you," said Daphne. "Ursula has absolutely no qualifications for any sort of post. We were thankful when she had the chance of coming to Italy. She seems to like her present place, it is a better one apparently than the one she had in Rome."

"There is not the slightest reason for a sister of yours to earn her own living at all!" said Lord Cheam.

Daphne opened her blue eyes very wide.

"If she likes to do it I am certainly not going to try to prevent her," she said; "and I strongly advise

you not to interfere. Ursula is proud and headstrong, and mamma says she was always difficult to deal with. She used to say, too, it would be simply fatal for her to be idle. I am quite sure she was right. The first time she gets a moment to herself she goes and becomes a Roman Catholic. If you only knew how we had all been brought up you would be amused to think she ever had the courage."

They went down to dinner. In the lounge young Carter was standing with a gloomy expression upon his dark face. He hoped that perhaps Daphne had managed to shunt her sister somewhere for the evening, but when he beheld her approaching, accompanied by her husband as well as by Ursula, he felt defrauded. He had looked forward to a solitary dinner with Lady Cheam. Was that really her husband; that old man? His disappointment was very visible in his face as he came toward the little group.

Lord Cheam took scarcely any notice of him; it was a means he frequently employed for expressing his disapproval of the presence of some unnecessary young man. Fortunately, for his own peace of mind, he had never been to Pentarn, Daphne had carefully prevented that, so he had never had the opportunity of hearing any gossip about his wife and Aubrey Carter.

It did not prove a successful party. Lord Cheam was obstinately silent, and sometimes regarded the artist through his pince-nez with an intentionally disdainful expression. Ursula felt shy and confused, she could hardly believe that she was really there with Daphne under these new and changed conditions. The conversation was maintained chiefly by Lady Cheam, who seemed quite undisturbed by her husband's latent hostility which was so perceptible to everyone else. She talked almost all the time to Aubrey Carter, and they discussed Vallombrosa and

Camaldoli, which they appeared to have visited together that day. Every moment Lord Cheam's face became more threateningly gloomy. And Ursula was not slow to perceive that Daphne was purposely trying to arouse his jealousy. It had always amused her to provoke people. She had done exactly the same thing at home to arouse her father's swift anger. Why couldn't she try to make people happy instead of miserable?

During the meal Lord Cheam, who was consistently silent and appeared deeply pre-occupied, was slowly making up his mind to invite Ursula to remain with them, at any rate, for the present. It was absurd for his wife's sister, a young and pretty girl, to work for her living, especially in such a subordinate position. It was neither just nor fair, and there was no longer any necessity for her to do it. And she did not look in the least proud and headstrong or difficult to deal with, as Daphne had described her. Her quiet lady-like manner pleased him. Of course it was a great pity she should have become a Roman Catholic, but surely, whatever her religion, she would have a good influence over Daphne. He was devoted to his wife, was still ardently in love with her, but her selfishness, her recklessness, and her rapacity had already severely disillusioned him.

"We'll have our coffee upstairs," said Daphne, when dinner was at last over.

As she rose to leave the room many eyes were turned toward her. She was the most striking-looking as well as the most beautiful woman there. In that plain severely-cut dress of hers and the broad black hat which revealed so little of her hair, she looked like a young queen. Ursula followed her, a demure figure in black. As they passed toward the elevator Daphne whispered to her:

"Do for goodness' sake try to keep Cheam in a good temper. Talk to him—you were as silent as a mouse during dinner."

Presently she found herself near her brother-in-law in the private sitting-room upstairs.

"I hope you are not obliged to hurry back," he said, almost at once. "I don't know how long Daphne has asked you to stay, but I should be very glad if you could remain with us for the next few months. We shall be abroad all the winter, and we mean to go on to Rome and then to Naples and Sicily. In the spring we shall go to the south of France. I have a villa near Nice."

For a few minutes Ursula was silent. She was taken aback at the suddenness of the suggestion, especially after what Daphne had told her about her husband's dislike to the Roman Catholic Church. Once, at Pentarn, for instance, the invitation would have seemed to her too good to be true—the thought of going abroad, of traveling in luxury and comfort. But now she had found a niche where she was happy, tranquil, useful and at peace. She was considered and appreciated. She loved the Princess and her children. She had spent such calm beautiful days at the ancient villa at Mintella, and she was aware that it had done much to heal her old wounds, had compensated her for that past time of protracted distress and suffering.

And yesterday, before Daphne's telegram came, she had felt almost madly happy. They had torn her away from that, but they could not surely insist upon her remaining with them.

"I am asking you to come less for your own sake than for Daphne's. I am sure she would prefer to have her sister with her."

He looked at Ursula almost entreatingly. Of course, the girl could not possibly be so foolish as to

refuse. She could not really like the life she was leading. She must be seen and introduced, there was no reason why she should not make a good marriage. And if she remained with them she should have every opportunity of so doing.

"I should have to think it over," said Ursula. "I could not decide all at once. But it is very kind of you to wish it."

"We both wish it," he said briefly.

"Has Daphne told you that I am a Catholic? Wouldn't that make any difference?" she said.

In her heart she hoped that he did not know, and that the knowledge would make him retract his invitation.

He smiled. "Yes, she did say something about it. I know how fatal Rome can be to the young and inexperienced. I should dislike it very much if you were to try to convert my wife, but I am convinced there is no danger of that—she has absolutely no leanings toward any form of religion!"

He looked across the room at his wife. She was sitting on the sofa, talking in an animated manner to young Carter who could not keep his eyes from her face. He had been desperately in love with her in the old Pentarn days, and gossip had even declared that they were secretly engaged. But after the coming of Humphrey Willmot to the neighborhood Daphne had deliberately snubbed him; and the young man had left St. Faith's for good the very day that her engagement to Lord Cheam had been announced. Ursula felt a little frightened as she looked at them now. The situation seemed to her so full of danger, and Daphne was curiously excited; her eyes were very bright.

Ursula could understand now why it was that Lord Cheam wished her to join them. It was to shelter Daphne, by the mere fact of her presence,

from evil tongues. In two months he had no doubt been able to take an accurate measure of her folly. No one on earth had ever had the slightest control over her, and now she was the typical beggar-on-horseback. Of course, he had contributed to her folly by acceding to her father's request and settling a large sum of money upon her on their marriage day. She could do exactly what she liked with the income that was derived from it, and if Mr. Finch had ever thought she would repay him for the enormous debts she had contracted as a girl he was very much mistaken, as he soon afterward discovered. He had been obliged to make a private appeal to Lord Cheam who had sent him a check for the amount none too willingly. The episode had given him an insight into his wife's character, which was far from being an agreeable one. He was aghast at her spendthrift ways. She did nothing to help her parents, and it had formed part of his original intention in giving her this money that she should be able to do so without always appealing to him. She preferred to leave them in grinding poverty, refusing assistance even with regard to her girlhood's debts. She had offered Nicholas no help, assuring her husband when he questioned her on the point that her brother was a ne'er-do-well. Lord Cheam had heard quite a different account of the boy, but Daphne refused to allow him to give Nicholas any assistance. She was also perfectly satisfied that Ursula should earn her own living as a nursery-governess. Clothes, jewels, and amusements were her passion, and she would pour out money lavishly to obtain them. He would have forgiven her all this if she had only cared for him, or if she had even been polite to him.

It was to his credit that he had so quickly discerned the worth of Ursula whom Daphne had scarcely ever mentioned to him.

That night when Ursula had gone to her own room she heard a tap at the door and Daphne appeared.

"Well, Ursula, has he told you that he wants you to come and travel with us?"

"Yes," said Ursula.

She was sitting in front of the mirror brushing out her long hair of silken darkness. She was a little tired with all the excitements of the day. She felt as if she had been carried against her will into a new and strange world, where everyone spoke a different language and held different ideals.

"What a quantity of hair you've got, Ursula," said Daphne, regarding her attentively. "I do believe it's longer than mine. Well, what did you say?"

"I don't think I said anything. I thought I'd like to talk it over with the Princess first, Daphne. She has been so very kind to me. I shouldn't like to leave her without a very good reason."

"Oh, I am sure you needn't consider her. Just tell her you aren't going back. Say that I want you. You'll have plenty of money while you're with us, and I've got simply heaps of clothes that I'm sick of and which you can have."

Ursula looked at her sister with grave eyes.

"Do you really want me, Daphne?"

"Yes, I think it's a good scheme. Quite a brain-wave on the part of poor old Cheam. You wouldn't hate it, would you, Ursula? A third person would be the saving of us!" She laughed a little bitterly.

Daphne's reasons were never simple; they were on the contrary often very complicated. Ursula might prove at times very much in the way; especially if she were conscientious. On the other hand, her presence, her loyalty (a quality which could always be counted upon), would allay Cheam's jealous suspicions and keep him in a good humor. Ursula,

if she played her cards well, under Daphne's direction, might prove a most useful adjunct to their little party. And at the back of her mind she had another reason which she was certain no one could possibly be sufficiently brilliant to discover, and which arose from a jealous dislike that Ursula should return to the house where Humphrey Willmot was staying. It was inconceivable, of course, that he should think of Ursula, but he was unlike other men and seldom cared for women whom everyone else admired. It would have tormented Daphne grievously to see Ursula happily married to a man who had remained cold, despite all possible encouragement and opportunity, to her own charms.

On the day upon which she had sent her sister that telegram she had received two letters. One was from her mother telling her that Ursula had been dismissed from the Garronis and was now living with Princess Cantarelli at Mintella, in Tuscany; and the other was from Mrs. Willmot who said they were expecting Humphrey home very shortly; he was just leaving Rome and was to stay a few days with his old friend, Princess Cantarelli, at Mintella, on his way. It was a strange little coincidence and Daphne had profited by it to send for her sister immediately.

She was astonished that Ursula should have come so quickly, so meekly. She had evidently suspected nothing.

And if at any time the arrangement didn't prove a success it would be perfectly easy to get rid of her. Nothing so easy in all the world as to accomplish that! There was nothing of the limpet or the leech about Ursula! A look was almost enough to frighten her away. How submissive she had been about her first departure for Rome with Madame Garroni! Not a word of remonstrance or of mutiny had es-

caped her. Just that pale acquiescence that made you almost doubt whether she understood. Only her red eyes told you that she *did* care, and had wept in private over that unattractive, unpropitious fate!

"I—I could go back to Mintella at once and talk it over with the Princess," said Ursula at last, beginning to plait up her long hair.

Daphne frowned.

"What nonsense! Where would be the use? We shall be leaving Florence very soon—I half thought of going on somewhere to-morrow. So, in any case, there wouldn't be time for you to go there. You can go or stay, my dear Ursula, but do, please, make up your mind. You are not flatteringly eager to be with me again, I must say!"

"I must think it over," said Ursula.

All at once she felt that she had been captured by Pentarn webs. They were closing about her, so tightly that they hurt her. She had been a slave to Daphne for so many years, and now they were inviting her to return to that slavery, after a first taste of comparative freedom. She had been happy at the old villa, surrounded by consideration, comfort, and kindness, and she knew quite well that she could never be happy with Daphne. It would be precisely the same ancient slavery, under new conditions. But the chains would not be less heavy, less galling. She could have cried out in rebellion.

Daphne went toward the door. She could see by Ursula's expression that her point was won.

"Good-night, Ursula. I really want you, and we both hate to think of you wasting your life as nursery-governess to those foreign brats!"

She went away laughing.

CHAPTER XXXIV

WHEN her sister had gone Ursula went to the window and looked out. The night was not cold and the stars were wonderfully bright. On the opposite side of the river the old houses of Oltr' Arno showed innumerable clusters of lights that spread away beyond the Roman Gate to the hills of San Miniato and Bellosguardo. The lamps on the old bridge too made a fiery chain between the two banks of the river. Carriages and motors were still clattering up and down the Lung' Arno. At intervals she heard a scrap of song flung out beautifully from a natural tenor-voice that sounded almost melancholy. But although she observed these sights and sounds quite attentively, her mind was full of Daphne's proposal, almost to the exclusion of all other thoughts.

Did they really want her? Why did they want her? They pitied her perhaps because she was working for her own living, because she earned little, and was so shabbily dressed. Yet, she felt that she was earning her money far more honorably than Daphne who had married for wealth, and wealth only.

It would be a wrench to leave the villa. She had been very happy there, and the life suited her. Perhaps she had been too happy, and now she was to be called upon to serve God in other ways—harder, more difficult ways. She had no illusions on the subject of Daphne; it would not be an easy or a peaceful life. Often she would have—as she had had in the old days—a great deal to bear.

It was late before she fell asleep that night, taking with her into her dreams the impression that the sacrifice she was invited to make was almost beyond

her poor powers. She longed to get up early and creep out of the hotel, and go back to Mintella and beg the Princess to refuse to give her up.

All through her dreams Daphne's figure glanced in and out; she heard her light voice, and saw her mocking smile.

The sun was pouring into her room when she awoke. It must surely be late. It was nearly nine o'clock, and Ursula dressed hastily and went to the Church of the Santissima Trinità to Mass. When she returned she had her coffee in the dining-room. All thoughts of escaping had left her. She had made up her mind to submit. While she was sitting there her brother-in-law came into the room. He advanced to the table, greeted her in friendly fashion, and sitting down opposite to her he ordered his own breakfast to be brought.

"Daphne says she talked over this proposal with you last night," he said, regarding her with disconcerting attention through his pince-nez. "Have you come to any decision?"

"I—I don't know," said Ursula.

She crumbled her bread. Yes, she was weak, she was sure to give in. She hadn't the courage to choose the path that promised a tranquil secure happiness. She was going to let them drag her away. In time, perhaps, they would actually take her back to Pentarn.

"Daphne says she is sick of this place," he said after a pause; "she wants to go to Rome on Monday. I hope you will make up your mind to accompany us. I understand that you don't wish to put your present employer to any inconvenience, but I know the Princess and if you like I can write to her and explain matters. She is a woman of the world, and she will surely realize that your circumstances are now changed and that your sister has first claim."

His eyes rested piercingly upon Ursula, who had the feeling that she was being hypnotized into a course of action that both alarmed and dismayed her.

"Perhaps you are right," she said slowly; "perhaps it is true that Daphne has first claim. It may be my duty to go with her."

"Your pleasure too, I hope," said Lord Cheam, with the faintest note of rebuke in his voice.

Ursula rose. "I will go and write to the Princess. She begged me not to be away longer than a week," she said.

Lord Cheam watched her as she went out of the room.

"What an odd girl that is," he thought to himself. "She doesn't seem in the least elated at the prospect of being taken away from that drudgery and of living in luxury with us. Most people would have jumped at it!"

Ursula seemed to be the exact opposite to his wife in all things, in tastes as well as in appearance. She evidently cared nothing for money and luxury. She was simple, and proud, too, perhaps, preferring her independence. Still he was more than ever determined that she should come to them. A second edition of Daphne would not have been of the slightest use to him. But Ursula, it was easy to see, had ideals of which Daphne knew nothing. He believed—deluded man!—that Ursula would act as a restraint upon her sister, and keep the young Carters of this world at a respectful distance.

He had been a little surprised to find that Daphne was almost as anxious as he was himself to secure Ursula. Probably she had some secret motive into which he had not been able to penetrate, but since it had led her to agree with his own wishes, he felt that it would hardly be worth while to inquire into it. Ursula, who had the most to gain by the arrange-

ment, was curiously enough the one to hold back, as if actuated by some private dislike to the prospect. And it was not, he reflected, as if she had been long enough in her present place to form a lasting attachment to the people, or to forge indissoluble links of friendship. She couldn't have been there, Daphne had assured him, much more than two months. She could really find no difficulty about tearing herself away. She only surely needed a little persuasion to be convinced that they did need her. An excellent little creature, he thought, quite good-looking, too, though like all other women she seemed to suffer an eclipse when her sister was present. It was a pity that she had allowed herself to be sucked into the torrent of Roman Error! Part of her weakness, no doubt. She was of a yielding and docile disposition, easily influenced.

Ursula sat down at the writing-table and took up her pen. She must write the letter at once. It was no good delaying this disagreeable and difficult task. She was afraid that some symptom of disloyalty toward her sister might unwittingly betray itself in what she wrote. But she put the consideration of Daphne resolutely from her. It was not really for Daphne's sake alone that she had left Mintella and come to Florence, just as it was not entirely for Daphne's sake that she had made up her mind now not to return to that beloved abode of comfort and peace. It was a duty, a task, which God demanded of her. If God required of her that she should remain and help Daphne in a critical and rebellious hour, she must not think of herself nor of her own pleasure. Always she wished to be the little servant, the poor servant, eagerly obedient to the divine will. She was no longer blindly self-sacrificing as she had been at Pentarn, when she had simply obeyed a common feminine instinct of giving herself for

others. Now she could see the golden Purpose that animated all things. She had a strong sense, too, that if the sacrifice were to be offered at all it must be done willingly and readily. No delay, no holding back, no thought of personal pain, but a simple casting aside of the nets to follow a path that was still unknown. Ursula was one of those chosen souls who eagerly learn hard lessons in detachment.

She would not think of Humphrey. She would not permit herself to send him the simplest most conventional message. While he had been at the villa he had spoken, it is true, but few words to her, and yet even in those scant hours and during those brief meetings he had contrived to re-animate within her that ancient hope she had never dared for a moment to cherish. She had never permitted herself to believe that he cared for her. Yet, sometimes, he had destroyed by word and look all her proud resolve to believe the contrary. There had been something in his glance, as it rested upon her face, that assured her she was not only dear to him but passionately dear. A remembrance of that night in Rome flashed back to her mind. The eagerness with which he had come to her help then, the warmth of his sudden greeting, had flung her back upon those very impressions she had tried to leave behind her with all other dear Pentarn things. Then his arrival at the villa two days ago, his entreaty—always more urgent than mere politeness seemed to dictate—that she might not go away. Now she was to detach herself deliberately from all further knowledge of him. She was to go where Daphne wished, where Daphne chose. The die was cast and she knew it, and she knew too that she was following the stern mandates of conscience.

Then suddenly her soul rebelled. She felt half sick with anger that they should thus coolly demand

this sacrifice of her. They must be aware that she didn't want to come; in the first moments she had not tried to conceal her reluctance. They must know, too, that their gay worldly life had not the slightest attraction for her. She had found a little obscure place that satisfied all her needs. She was fond of the Princess, grateful to her for her understanding kindness, and already the children were devoted to her. She loved the daily Mass in the chapel which seemed to sanctify each new succeeding day. There was an atmosphere of simple holiness at the villa which was new to her and seemed to strengthen her spiritual growth.

She chased these thoughts away and began the letter. It was quite short when finished, for she explained matters as briefly as possible, only expressing her regret that she could not return because her sister needed her. She could not say how truly sorry she was, but the Princess would surely understand. She paused scanning the written words that seemed so cold, so ungrateful. Yet, if Humphrey were to see them she felt that his swift and accurate discernment would supply all that she had left unsaid.

Only, of course, there would not be the slightest necessity for the Princess to show him the letter. He might even remain in ignorance as to the proposed change. Ursula felt herself too unimportant to be discussed.

She folded the letter and putting it into an envelope sealed it down. It was done now. She was not going to look back, to cry over spilt milk. She remembered her old determination to be now and always a cheerful giver.

Daphne coming into the room in an adorable robe of white silk and lace, with a dainty cap resting on her fair hair, encountered a perfectly normal and calm Ursula.

"Why, have you been out already?" she asked in surprise.

"Yes. I have been to Mass."

"Have you become *dévote* as well as Catholic?" she asked with a hint of raillery in her voice.

"Not nearly as *dévote* as I should like to be."

Daphne raised her eyebrows. Then her glance traveled to the envelope lying there duly stamped.

"Oh, have you written?" she asked eagerly.

"Yes. I've explained that I'm not going back."

"That's all right," said Daphne, with a look of relief. "You can't think how delighted poor old Cheam will be. He has set his heart on having you with us, it will keep him in a good temper, I hope, for months to come! And you'll have a ripping time, Ursula, the time of your life, I can promise you that. I always hoped that I should be able to do something for you!"

Ursula could have laughed to find herself thus thrust into the position of one who is to receive benefits. That she was conferring them would never enter Daphne's head. She was either perfectly unaware of the sacrifice Ursula was making or she was determined to ignore it. But where was the use of enlightening her?

"I rather thought your reluctance was a pose yesterday," said Lady Cheam; "you are old enough to know now which side your bread is buttered on. You see you will never be allowed to go back to Pentarn now that you are a Catholic and it wouldn't be much fun going through life as a nursery-governess. You've had no education to speak of, and you could never hope to get a much higher post. And, by the way, Cheam says you are to have two hundred a year while you are with us, and, of course, all your expenses will be paid. You didn't expect more, did you, Ursula?"

Daphne had immense faith in her husband's capabilities of paying liberally when he wanted a thing. Ursula could ask for more if she chose.

To her astonishment her sister reddened. "I didn't expect anything, Daphne. I am afraid I shall cost you a great deal as it is."

"How did you intend to dress then?" said Daphne. "You must have money for that. I couldn't possibly afford to do it out of my own allowance. And I may as well tell you frankly, Ursula, that he won't refuse if you ask for more."

"I shall certainly not ask for it," said Ursula. Her sister's attitude toward money had always been incomprehensible to her. "You know it would be impossible for me to earn as much as that. I had twenty-five pounds a year at the Garronis, and the Princess gave me two hundred lire a month."

Suddenly she thought: "I shall be able to send quite a lot home, and I can help Nicholas too." She was sure that she would hardly need anything for herself, and the prospect of being able to help her brother brightened all the future.

"Please thank your husband very much, Daphne. It is very generous of him."

"Oh, I'll be sure to tell him!" said Daphne laughing, as she went out of the room.

Daphne was in high good humor all that day. She took Ursula out shopping that morning, and bought her hats, coats, and frocks, blouses and furs, till the girl felt utterly bewildered at the prospect of possessing so many things. She grudged the money that was being spent so freely upon her, and longed to tell her sister not to make any more purchases. She would far rather have had it to send home, and once she timidly suggested something of the kind.

"Nonsense!" said Daphne. "I can't have you looking like a ragbag. You must be decently dressed."

Few young girls can perhaps be wholly insensible to their first acquisition of pretty and dainty apparel, and to do Daphne justice she chose everything that she thought would be becoming to Ursula. The girl looked quite transformed when she put on her new things for the first time. It was ungrateful, she felt, to wish herself back at the villa wearing her old shabby raiment again.

CHAPTER XXXV

SUNDAY had come and on the morrow they were to leave for Rome. They would remain abroad perhaps for several months, wandering about from place to place, staying in each one only as long as Daphne chose. Ursula in her heart believed that the arrangement would only continue for a short time. Daphne would soon weary of it, would find some excuse for getting rid of her.

The future seemed to her both dark and uncertain. Daphne was a capricious person, and her sister knew that she would be absolutely in her power. She wanted her company now for some private reason of her own, but very soon the time might come when she would not wish for her any more.

Ursula went that morning to High Mass at the Church of the Annunziata. It was, as always, very full, and when she entered she saw that many people were kneeling and praying around the famous shrine at whose altar a Low Mass was just being celebrated. Ursula knelt down to pray with the others before going nearer to the High Altar to find a seat. The blaze of candles made a brilliant patch of light in the sombre church.

An hour later she came out, feeling comforted and sustained. After all, the outlook was not so dark. And the joy of being able to help Nicholas was a compensation for all that she had been called upon to sacrifice. She went out into the brilliant December sunshine that lay in bars of mellowed gold upon the city. She passed the hospital of the Innocenti, and walked across the square where the statue of the Grand Duke Ferdinand recalls to all English people Browning's famous poem of *The Statue and*

the Bust. Ursula looked up—as, indeed, which of us in passing has failed to look up?—expecting to see the "passionate pale lady's face" gazing, from its marble prison set in the window above, upon the statue riding its prancing steed below.

She paused for a moment, and as she stood there a voice broke in upon her thoughts:

"No, you won't see her. I believe she was never really there. Some people say that Browning invented the whole story. Does it matter? It was at least *ben trovato* as they say here!"

It hardly surprised her to see Humphrey and to hear his voice. She knew now that she had been expecting him to come. A foolish dream, perhaps—yet even such unlikely dreams as that had come true before now. She had tried to banish him from her thoughts, a stern self-discipline of which she had learned painfully the wisdom, but he had a trick of dominating them all nevertheless. She had not forgotten that he had once discussed Browning with her, with all the ardor of a passionate disciple; he had even talked about this very poem. Did he remember it now?

" 'Let a man contend to his uttermost, for his life's set prize be what it will!' " he quoted. "I have always liked those words. When I read them I think of Browning taking his wife, that fair-coined soul, as Francis Thompson says, from where she lay rusting in a pool of tears, and bearing her away to Italy. That was his life's set prize and he overcame all obstacles to obtain it."

He went on speaking, aware that Ursula looked confused and a little embarrassed at his sudden appearance. Evidently he had startled her. But she had time, while he made this light speech, to recover from her surprise. That his coming had any connection with herself—with her own plans—never oc-

curred to her. Indeed, at the moment, it was enough for her to know that he had come, that he was really there.

"Have you just arrived?" she asked at last.

"I came last night."

"Do you know if the Princess had received my letter?"

"Yes. It came in the morning."

"She told you perhaps of the change?"

"Yes," he said again. Then he cleared his throat. "I must tell you my dear Miss Finch, without further preliminary, that it has my heartiest and most unqualified disapproval. I feared something of the sort when your sister's telegram came. Which way are you going? I will walk with you. It will give me such immense pleasure to tell you exactly what I think."

"You must not try to persuade me not to go. I feel that it is my duty," said Ursula. She spoke almost harshly. It would be so fatally easy for him to persuade her. He weakened her high resolve.

They walked down the narrow street, the Via dei Servi, with the Dome lifting its ruby shape against the bright blue of the sky, just in front of them.

"It was to give myself precisely this pleasure that I came to Florence two days sooner than I intended. To-day I meant to call at the hotel and ask to see you. But I was horribly afraid lest I should find that I was too late, that you had already left."

"To-morrow you would have been too late. We are going to Rome to-morrow. And after that to Naples and Sicily."

As she enumerated the places something of the old sense of desolation came over her. She was never quite so brave when Humphrey was there. His very compassion diminished her courage.

"It is on that very point that I wish to remon-

strate with you," he told her. His voice was light and satirical as ever, but she thought she had never seen him look so serious and determined before.

"You are *not* going to join your sister and her husband," he said, in a tone of suppressed anger, which she had the wisdom to know was in no way directed against herself. "I am not going to allow it. You will ask me, I suppose, what right I have to interfere between you. I am going to ask you to give me that right!"

They stopped beneath the shadow of the Dome, and Ursula meeting his eyes saw in them that strange expression which had been in them that night when he had come to her aid in the Roman hotel. It thrilled her now with a trembling excitement and fear, just as it had done then. It awakened that old hope in her heart that she began to feel she would never be called upon to repress again.

"Will you give me that right, Ursula?" he asked.

Neither of them paid the slightest heed to the passers-by, some of whom stopped to bestow interested or curious glances upon them. It was impossible now for Ursula to mistake his meaning or to be deceived by the expression in his face, which was at once tender and stern. She knew now that this was her hour—the hour that comes sooner or later to most women, when love offers them its great and lasting treasures. And it seemed to her that only to stand there and listen to Humphrey's voice filled the whole world with a strange almost insupportable sweetness.

Above their heads the slim column of Giotto's Tower glittered palely in the strong sunlight. A motor clattered past. She saw people pushing their way eagerly into the trams. Wonderful that the world should still be going on with its accustomed round as if nothing at all had happened.

"Do speak to me, Ursula dear," he said at last.

It gave her a little shock to hear his voice break with emotion as he uttered the words. She lifted her eyes, and saw that his face was pale and drawn with suspense as if he could bear to wait no longer for her answer. For the first time she understood how greatly he cared for her. He looked almost afraid that he was going to lose her. Was she really his "life's set prize?" Was it for this reason he had followed her to Florence?

"Don't you understand? I love you—I want you to be my wife. And I have sometimes hoped that you were not quite indifferent to me!"

No, she had never been indifferent. Long ago in Pentarn that love she need never repress again had been born. She had hidden it secretly in her heart ever since. Always she had been afraid of betraying it. Now she need never be afraid of doing so again. He loved her. He wanted her to be his wife. The world—the busy commonplace world—seemed to be spinning about her.

He took her hand in his.

"I told the Princess exactly why I was coming before I left. She wants you to come back with me for a few days before I go to England. Just for a short visit, so that we can see a little of each other. You'll come, won't you?"

"Yes," said Ursula.

They walked on in silence to the Via Tornabuoni. At last she said:

"Won't it make any difference to you—my being a Catholic?"

"Yes, the greatest difference in the world," he assured her.

"You think your parents will mind?" she asked timidly.

"I was not thinking of them. I was thinking of

myself. When I first heard of it in Rome it made me feel a coward."

"A coward?"

"Yes, because you had had the courage to do just what I was afraid of doing. Now you have changed all that. I shall be a Catholic before we are married, Ursula."

"Oh, I am so glad," she said impulsively; "so very glad!"

"You have never said yet that you will marry me," said Humphrey. "You leave me to take so much for granted."

"Didn't I say yes? I meant to. But you took me so by surprise. I never thought you could possibly care for me."

"It began at Pentarn," said Humphrey.

"Did it really?" He was surprising her more and more with his revelations.

"Yes," he said, "I made a last struggle for liberty then, my dear Ursula. But I couldn't forget you—I had to come and seek you out to find if I had been mistaken or not. But that night in Rome—"

He stopped short. Then he added in a more matter-of-fact tone:

"You were very elusive, were you not? You had a most singular talent for escaping! I was in despair."

She looked straight in front of her.

"Oh," she said, "can't you see why? I wanted to go away to forget you. It began at Pentarn with me, too."

And with this reassurance Humphrey was amply satisfied.

"Yesterday when your letter came I made up my mind you should never escape from me again till I had had my answer from your own lips. Daphne had already defrauded me once, and I was deter-

mined that she should never do it again. I hope now that I shall be able to forgive her."

When they reached the hotel she invited him to come in, but this he refused to do.

"No, I'll come back later. But promise me, my darling Ursula, that you won't try to run away from me again? I don't feel as if I could trust you yet!"

"I promise you that I won't escape," she told him, with a most beautiful light in her eyes.

"And we must be married very soon. Tell Lady Cheam that I positively refuse to wait!"

She moved toward the door. "You'll come this afternoon?" she said.

"At three o'clock. Please be waiting downstairs for me, Ursula. I shan't feel safe until I see you. And to-morrow we will go back to Mintella."

CHAPTER XXXVI

URSULA went straight up to her sister's sitting-room. Since Humphrey was to return so early in the afternoon, it was necessary to tell her at once that her plans were altered and that she could not accompany them to Rome. Yet, she went unwillingly to seek this interview with Lady Cheam. She had still a little secret fear that Daphne might once more step between her and her happiness. She knew the power of Daphne, how great it was, how unscrupulous it could be. She was afraid of it. Twice already had Daphne wrested her from Humphrey. She had been blind not to perceive it before. But Humphrey had seen it—he had told her that he hoped now to be able to forgive Daphne. Oh, she had really nothing to fear! Humphrey's love was surely stronger than all the efforts that could be made now to destroy it.

She came into the room. Daphne was lying on the sofa reading a novel. Her attitude took Ursula at once back to Pentarn, and she seemed to see her in the window-seat of the dining-room leaning her head against the faded rag of green curtain.

Lady Cheam looked up as she came into the room. She bestowed upon Ursula a long and close scrutiny. Yes, she was certainly looking her best to-day in that new dark blue coat and skirt, with the black fur stole coming close against her slim white throat. The hat, too, with its blue wings was becoming. One might almost call Ursula pretty, especially when she had that soft flush in her cheeks, that light in her grey eyes. She had quite lost her old, oppressed, down-trodden look.

"I have come to tell you, Daphne, that I can't go with you after all," said Ursula.

Daphne threw down her book.

"What nonsense! Of course you are coming!" she said, in a surprised, indignant tone. "You cannot possibly play fast and loose with us like this. Nor can you quarrel with the only relations who will have anything to do with you. I advise you to put such an idea as that out of your head."

"I am going back to Mintella to-morrow morning," said Ursula.

"You shall do no such thing!" declared Daphne, her temper now thoroughly aroused. "I do not know what has come over you, Ursula, but I think you must have gone mad. However, I don't intend to let you give way to your folly."

"Don't be angry, Daphne," said Ursula, smiling, "I haven't told you everything yet. You see I'm engaged to be married, and the Princess wants me to go back to her on a visit."

"Engaged to be married!" repeated Daphne, visibly impressed. "Why, whom on earth are you going to marry, Ursula? Not an Italian, I hope? We did hear some talk of you and a young relation of the Garronis while you were in Rome!"

"I am going to marry Humphrey Willmot," said Ursula. Even as she uttered the words they seemed too unreal, too stupendous to be believed. It was still too much like one of those beautiful dreams that had so often haunted her slumbers, and in which Humphrey had come to tell her of his love.

"You are not! You must be dreaming, Ursula! Why, you hardly know him!"

Of course Ursula must be making a mistake. It was quite impossible that Humphrey should wish to marry her. But as she looked at her sister now she could not deny that her face was suffused with a strange, satisfied happiness that was altogether new to it.

"I met him this morning as I was coming out of church. He saw my letter to the Princess, telling her that I was not going back, and so he came to Florence last night." Ursula's voice was soft and lingering. It was easy to see that she could not quite believe in her own happiness.

Daphne was contemplating with dismay the failure of her own plans. Humphrey had simply stepped in with a frank and straight-forward declaration, and had destroyed them all. She had only precipitated matters; had only succeeded in flinging these two persons—threatened with an arbitrary separation—into each other's arms.

She envied Ursula. Through all her anger she envied her passionately. Many, many women would thus envy her.

"Does he know that you have become a Catholic? If you have kept that from him it will probably put an end to the whole affair the moment he finds it out." Daphne's voice had a harsh, ugly quality.

"Of course he knows. He told me he was very glad. I think he will soon be one himself," answered Ursula, simply.

She looked beautiful then, in her new-found happiness. There was no need to ask her if she loved him. It stood confessed in her radiant eyes.

"I envy you," said Daphne, speaking almost reluctantly as if the acknowledgment were being dragged from her. "You'll have just the kind of happiness that I've missed. You are extraordinarily lucky, Ursula."

For a moment her own face seemed to lose something of its youth. She had wanted to marry Humphrey Willmot last spring. He had been the one man who had ever really attracted her. And he had never shown her anything but a scarcely-veiled hostility beneath his always courteous and charming

manner. But even as long ago as that he had noticed Ursula, had contrived to arrange meetings with her, had sent her books to read. What was there in Ursula to arouse the love of such a man as that?

"Shall you mind if I go back to the villa to-morrow, Daphne? If you wish it very much I could perhaps go to Rome with you for a little."

"No, no," said Daphne. She was wise enough to see when the game was lost. "You must go with Humphrey. He has first claim on you now. He wouldn't thank me for taking you away—I dare say he would even try to prevent it."

"But I shan't like keeping all those pretty frocks and things you've given me."

"They'll be useful for your trousseau," said the practical Daphne; "you'll want lots of pretty frocks when you're Mrs. Humphrey Willmot! We can't let you go to him like the Beggar Maid." She forced a smile. "I must go and break the news to Cheam." She went toward the door and then paused. "I've never congratulated you, Ursula. But I'll say this for you: you deserve your luck. I know you will be happy—people like you always are. I suppose you will be married soon?"

"We haven't settled anything. Only he doesn't want to wait."

Daphne, with her hand on the door, regarded Ursula critically, almost as if she were looking at her for the first time.

"Will you tell me if you were in love with him at Pentarn?" she asked, curiously.

"I suppose I was. I tried not to think of it," said Ursula.

"Did you ever think then that he might be falling in love with you?" pursued Daphne, inexorably.

"I did think of it once or twice. But it seemed

impossible. I used to tell myself that it was only because he was a little sorry for me. Now I know—he has told me—that it did begin then. With him as well as with me."

She spoke in a quiet, restrained tone.

"Did you guess that was the reason why we made you go abroad?"

"Yes. I thought it had something to do with it. Mamma was so angry about the books—about our going on the cliffs together."

"You must be an angel, Ursula, to bear no grudge!" said Daphne.

"Oh, Daphne, when I'm so grateful!"

"Grateful, child! What on earth do you mean?"

"I mean, my going to Rome was worth everything to me. Even if it had succeeded in separating me eternally from Humphrey."

Daphne had the sense to see that Ursula was not referring now to any temporal happiness, but to those gifts of the Spirit of which she herself was ignorant, and which she pretended to despise.

"Well, it is wonderful that you have accomplished his conversion too," she said enviously.

"He thinks that he accomplished mine," said Ursula, smiling. "It was he who first praised the Catholic Church to me. He used to speak of it often at Pentarn, and I knew he loved it. But I never thought then that I should become a Catholic."

Daphne came back across the room, and moved by a rare impulse of affection she stooped and kissed her.

"Well, they will say at Pentarn that we have both done very well for ourselves! No doubt papa will forgive you now, and in any case it doesn't much matter. You will be awfully happy I expect—you and Humphrey will still be like lovers long after Cheam and I have torn each other to pieces!" She

gave a harsh, grating laugh. She couldn't bear to think of the happiness that was to be Ursula's.

"I've been a brute to you, I know, Ursula," she said suddenly; "but don't please teach Humphrey to hate me too much!"

"I shan't let him hate you at all," said Ursula, smiling.

For the first time in her life she felt sorry for Daphne, who had missed so much that she herself had gained.

CHAPTER XXXVII

PENTARN again—in May, when, be the weather what it will, England is always at her loveliest with her mantle of fresh green, her meadows strewn with silver drifts of flowers.

St. Faith's. The huddled grey cottages, the clustered slate roofs, the blunt shape of the Island lifted above the long blue line of the Atlantic, dividing it in two. The little grey chapel of St. Nicholas crowning its summit, built on the site of one of those ancient Cornish shrines, the study of which had brought Humphrey Willmot back to the old faith. The green slopes of the Island where the fishing nets, laid out to dry, formed brown patches.

Down in the harbor the tide is out, and the space of gleaming wet sand shows pools of blue reflected from the sky. The fishing-boats will not be afloat again for some hours. In the meantime the flocks of sea-gulls are enjoying their feast of fragments, stirring restlessly in the rigging, quarreling upon the decks, waddling on the flat sand like animated balls of snow. Circling overhead with unhappy mewing cries that always seem to hold something of the tragedy of the sea.

Now the white road that goes along the top of the hill, dipping and climbing till it reaches Pentarn. Thick hedges of veronica, dark green, glossy leaves, and short purple plumes of blossom. Flaming spaces in the Cornish woods, where the earliest rhododendrons have burst into bloom in warm south corners. Wonderful misty carpets of bluebells like fragments of sky dropped down into the woods, filling the air with a perfume of almonds. Armies of fox-gloves, whose proud and slender spires match

the rhododendrons in color, and whose little honey-filled purple purses offer a perpetual feast for the bees. Torrents of rose-pink valerian decorating old stone walls, just as the roses do in Italy, flaming, too, on sunny banks, a riot of color, royal in its splendor. Glimpses of the sea, now very calm and blue under the pale May sky.

Now the green sweep of the Cornish coast, fading into delicate mists. The black rocks polished and gleaming with the caress of the waves. Pentarn Rock and lighthouse! . . . The groups of grey austere-looking little cottages. The heaps of slack, the skeleton machinery lifting gaunt, ugly arms to the sky, to show where once men dived deep into the earth's recesses to bring forth its treasure. The square tower of the thirteenth-century church set in a grove of elms. The rectory standing close to it, narrow, oblong-shaped, insufficiently sheltered by the sparse wind-distorted trees.

Now the entrance to the Abbey grounds through the tall iron gates. On both sides of them fields of growing grass tossed back lightly by the wind, showing, too, spaces of silver where the big moon-daisies cluster. Patches of gorse, grey and superbly golden. Patches of scarlet poppies, frail silken chalices swaying tremulously. The woods where the young bracken is unfolding delicious emerald knots. The grey walls, ancient and watchful, waiting for their new master, Humphrey Willmot, to take up his abode there with his young wife.

Humphrey and his wife. . . .

She could hardly believe it, even now with that wonderful three months behind her of journeying alone with him through Italy and North Africa. It had passed like some ecstatic dream. Journeys through wide white desert places that she had never even hoped to see. Palm-trees and chalk-white

houses, and the fluting of Arab shepherds and the beating of Arab drums. A new world in which she had seemed to be quite alone with Humphrey in a happiness that was almost too great to be borne.

And now the home-coming, to the old house his father had bought for him as a wedding present. Pentarn was dear to him, and he wanted to have a foothold there.

He watched her now. How beautiful she was, with that soft color in her face, that steady shining of the grey eyes.

"Like it?" he said, and his blue-grey eyes, whimsical, ironical, sought hers.

"Oh, Humphrey, so very much!"

Long ago forgiveness had been sought and obtained from her parents. They were to meet tonight—her father and mother and Ruth had all been invited to dinner. Thus the reconciliation would be sealed. "My daughters have both made such excellent marriages," Mrs. Finch was never tired of saying. "Of course we all expected it of Daphne, but Ursula—" Nicholas, now established on a ranch of his own, was as happy as a king in the Canada he refused to leave. Next year perhaps Humphrey and Ursula would pay him a visit.

They had stopped now before the door of the Abbey. Above the grey chimneys the first swallows were circling. Pentarn! Her own world . . . The blue and green and gold of it. . . . The tang of the sea . . . the fresh winds from the Atlantic . . . Her own earth . . . Pentarn, where they had first known and learned to love each other.

(THE END)

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